

Studs Terkel interviews Taylor Branch

# In These Times

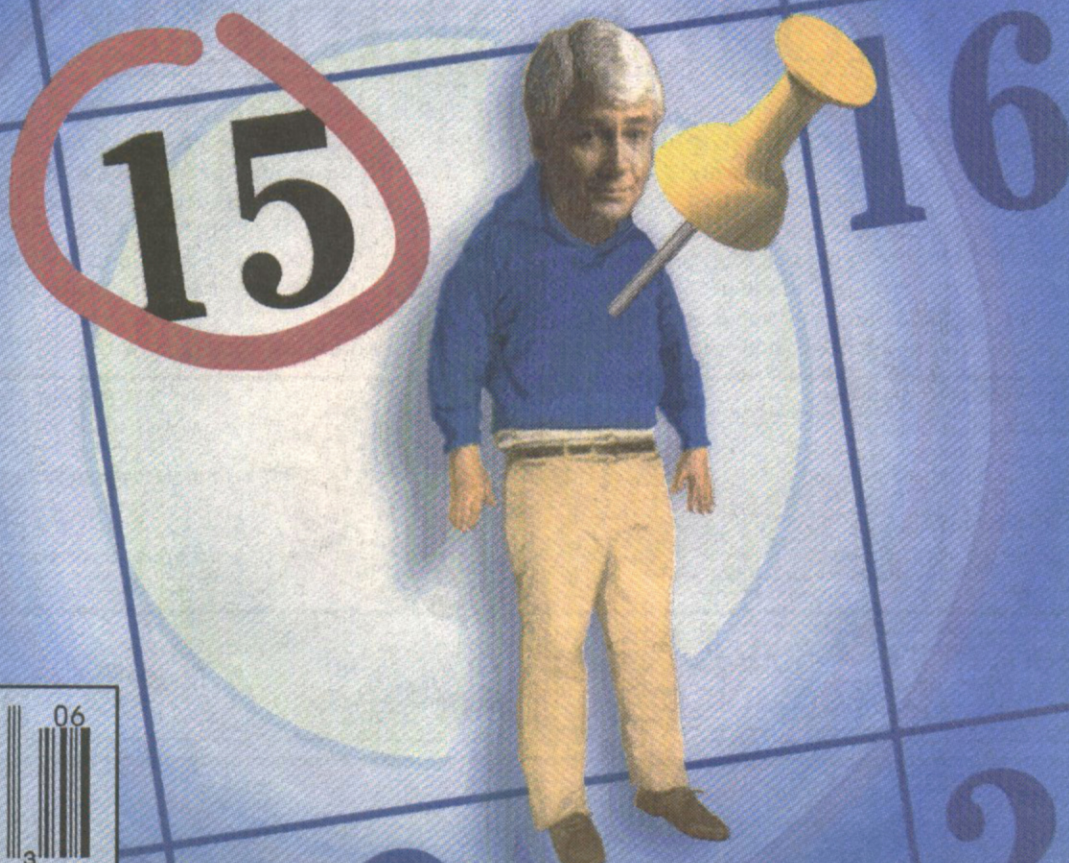
INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

April 5, 1998

## The Cruellest Month

**Why Republican tax-reform schemes  
would make April 15 even more unfair**

**Doug Henwood reports**



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# Radiation. Toxic Sludge. Antibiotics. Genetic Engineering.

## The USDA Wants To Add A Few Things To Your Organic Food.

The U. S. Department of Agriculture recently proposed national standards to regulate the production of organic food. Unfortunately, they have created rules which open the door for practices like genetic engineering, food irradiation, the use of toxic sewage sludge, and the use of antibiotics in organic food production – even though they are currently forbidden by independent and state organic certifiers. **There is still time to stop this assault on organic food, but your voice is crucial.**

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Tell them how important it is to develop standards that encourage environmental stewardship and a safe food supply. Mention that the re-written rules must adhere to the requirements of the Organic Food Production Act and to the principles consistently used by organic farmers. We need your help to “keep ‘organic’ organic.”

The deadline for letters is April 30, 1998.

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USDA, AMS, Room 4007 - S  
AgStop 0275, P.O. Box 96456  
Washington, D.C. 20090-6456

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President Clinton  
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## Editorial

# The Political Gains of War

**“W**ar,” wrote Karl von Clausewitz, the early 19th-century Prussian military theorist, “is the continuation of politics by other means.” This idea has remained unchallenged by serious historians and political scientists for almost two centuries.

If Clausewitz was correct, then a nation’s military intentions should be examined for political interest. Yet in presenting Saddam Hussein as a new Hitler who threatens the security of the entire world, the Clinton administration and the mainstream media have not bothered to tell us what Iraq would gain by attacking any of its neighbors—or what it would lose. Indeed, we are not even told whether Iraq has the means to overwhelm anyone. Nor, on the other hand, have the media told us what the administration and its corporate sponsors have to gain by bombing Iraq or by creating and maintaining its current show of force in the Gulf region.

For example, in late February the *New York Times*, that bastion of pompous respectability, devoted almost two full pages to documenting Iraq’s intention to produce anthrax bacillus—a bacteria usually fatal to animals but not to humans—while it barely touched on these essential questions. Only as an afterthought did the *Times* mention that to be fatal, highly concentrated amounts of anthrax spores must be inhaled and then left untreated by antibiotics. A pilot-less plane might spray 200 pounds of the stuff over a city and kill a million people, it stated, but only “if the winds were right, if no rain fell, if the [plane’s] nozzles did not get clogged, if the particles were the right size, if the population had no vaccinations, and so on.” (And, the *Times* might have added, if people massed together and waited to be sprayed, if unmanned enemy planes invading the victim country’s airspace were not shot down, and so on.)

The truth is that Iraq’s attempts to produce biological weapons are more pathetic

than dangerous. Hussein has neither the ability to start a war nor anything to gain by doing so, but he does achieve a lot from tweaking the Clinton administration’s nose. Throughout the Middle East, Hussein is increasingly seen as a hero who can stand up to—and outmaneuver—the world’s last great imperial power. Arabs of all classes are increasingly comfortable with Hussein. The region’s rulers admire the stability that accompanies his continued rule. And the popular masses admire his daring as well as his success in frustrating Washington. The United States, meanwhile, is now more than

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***Every so often,  
American leaders  
have to remind the  
world of their power  
and dominance.***

---

ever seen as a hypocritical bully that enforces U.N. sanctions against a country whose economy and modern industry have been destroyed, while refusing to force the Israelis to seek accommodation with the Palestinians.

So why do Clinton and the even more bellicose Republicans continue to beat their drums? Oil is the easy answer, but Iraq does not endanger U.S. oil supplies. Anyone who controls the Gulf’s oil must sell it. If there is an issue here, it is who will control and profit from those sales. But the threat in this regard is not Hussein. Rather, it is his removal from power, which might create enough social turmoil in the region to threaten the status quo.

There are, of course, ideological reasons for military action. Every so often, American leaders have to remind the world of their power and dominance, and this is especially important for a weak president like Clinton. The tension built up by exaggerating the threat posed by Hussein is also useful both in creating a rationale for a continued—and enhanced—U.S. military presence in the Middle East and in promoting arms sales to wealthy countries in the region.

In any case, Clinton got himself into a bind in Iraq. He was saved by international resistance to his threat to use force, and by Kofi Annan’s last-minute diplomacy. The United Nations has finally begun to function as a brake on imperial power. For that, we are thankful. —J.W.



Cover design by Estelle Carol.



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# Letters

## Closing Borders

Jane Slaughter's article ("Closing the Book on Borders," February 22) was very discouraging to workers organizing at Borders bookstores. The strategy, quotes and facts were distorted, which is sad, because usually it is the employer who distorts facts when it comes to union organizing, not the progressive media.

Collective bargaining in book superstores such as Borders is as new as the industry itself. Struggles for union representation have been just that, a struggle. But workers with a lot of guts and pride in their work are achieving their goals despite the sophisticated union-busting tactics that companies like Borders use. Workers have won contracts with job security, improved working conditions and wage increases, and will continue to do so.

We discuss strategy with rank-and-file worker committees and our own leadership, not with the press. The strategy that was implied in the article was not ours. We have not called off our organizing drive. Workers at Borders are still organizing for their fair share in Michigan and around the nation.

**Vanessa Sylvester**  
Director of Organizing  
United Food and Commercial Workers  
Local 951  
Grand Rapids, Mich.

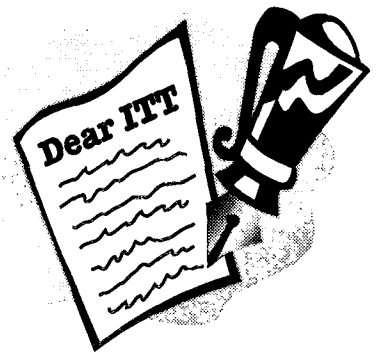
*Jane Slaughter replies: My description of the union's strategy at Borders was based on what several UFCW organiz-*

*ers explained to me over the course of five months. (I've written a total of eight articles about the campaign for various magazines; those articles became less sunny and cheerleading as time went on.) Rather than Borders workers being discouraged by my article, I suspect that they are discouraged by the company's intransigence and by the puny contracts they've won thus far. Nobody said winning a decent contract at a giant anti-union employer would be easy—I salute those who are trying—but it doesn't help the cause to sugarcoat the results.*

## Ying and Yang

I found your "Starr Wars" articles (March 8) interesting ying and yang journalism. Joel Bleifuss ("School for Scandal") did an excellent job of tracking the political motivations behind the so-called "Whitewater" investigations of not-very-independent prosecutor Kenneth Starr.

Then there was Doug Ireland ("The Powerful Odor of Mendacity"). He is so clearly biased against the Clintons that I wonder why he calls himself a journalist. There are the little signs—such as using everyone's last name except Hillary's (a little sexist, aren't we Ireland?)—to the sheer stupidity of suggesting that the Whitewater investigation is going nowhere because Starr dropped the ball. Rest assured, Starr's investigation will go nowhere because it has



nowhere to go. It was not Starr's decision to refer his findings to the House that made this a political matter. It was political from the day Starr replaced Robert Fiske as independent counsel.

If this were a real investigation, it would not have required more FBI agents than the Oklahoma City bombing case, it would not have cost \$40 to \$50 million and, of course, it would never have branched off into irrelevant territory, like the president's sex life.

More importantly, it would have ended years ago, leaving Ireland and the Republican congressional caucus with nothing to whine about. The funniest part of Ireland's "analysis" is his throw-away line that Judge Susan Webber Wright, the Clinton associate who is hearing the Paula Jones case, "showed her true colors" by ruling that the trial should be delayed until after Clinton finishes his term. Wright ruled that the Jones case would be too much of a distraction from the president's duties. Had the Supreme Court agreed, we might be talking about something much less exciting, but much more relevant, like Iraq.

**Joshua Weinstein**  
San Francisco

**Nicole Hollander**

**Sylvia**

the Woman  
Who Lies in  
her personal  
Journal



OH, RIGHT.  
Like you  
NEVER  
THOUGHT  
OF IT.

I CALLED BILL ON HIS PRIVATE LINE... DON'T ASK HOW I GOT THE NUMBER. "BILL," I SAID, "NOW THAT THIS LATEST Brouhaha is over, it's time to MAKE HEALTH CARE REFORM A PRIORITY." "NOPE! I'M NOT GOING DOWN THAT ROAD AGAIN." POOR BILL, HE SOUNDED EXHAUSTED. I HATED TO DO THIS TO HIM. "BILL, I HOPE YOU'RE NOT GOING TO MAKE ME PART WITH MY VIDEO OF OUR SPECIAL MOMENTS TOGETHER IN THAT TELEPHONE BOOTH LAST SPRING, ESPECIALLY TO SOMEONE AS UNSENTIMENTAL AS MR. STARR, ARE YOU?" HE MOANED AND PUT HILLARY ON.

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# California Schemin'

BY DAVID BACON

**W**hen John Sweeney was elected head of the AFL-CIO three years ago, labor was becoming politically irrelevant. But after high-profile victories over UPS and fast track as well as spending millions on grassroots mobilization and issue advertising in the 1996 elections, labor is once again a serious threat. Now, Republican strategists may have found a silver bullet to stop this new wave of labor activism: the ballot initiative.

Under the guise of campaign finance reform, conservatives are trying to stop the flow of money from union members into lobbying and elections. In Congress, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott has introduced the so-called Paycheck Protection Act, but there are not enough votes to override a presidential veto. Instead, the GOP is trying to hobble labor state-by-state. The attack is starting in California where Proposition 226 on the June ballot would force unions to obtain an annual authorization from each member before using dues money for political purposes. The California vote will serve as a bellwether for similar anti-union efforts already under way in at least 14 other states.

"The purpose of this initiative is not to end the influence of big money over politics or to give union members a voice over the use of their dues money," says Mary Bergan, president of the California Federation of Teachers. "This measure would actually deprive us of our right to participate in elections effectively. At the same time, those who oppose us, especially wealthy corporations and well-funded right-wing ideologues, would have no limits on their activity at all."

In Washington state, where a ballot measure directed against public employees passed in 1992, the number of teach-

ers union members contributing to political campaigns fell from 48,000 to 8,000. Republican representation in the state has increased substantially since then.

The California initiative is the product of James Righeimer, Mark Bucher and Frank Ury, a trio of extreme Republicans from the Education Alliance, a group dedicated to electing Christian conservatives to school boards in

announced he will raise an additional \$10 million for similar initiatives or legislation in other states.

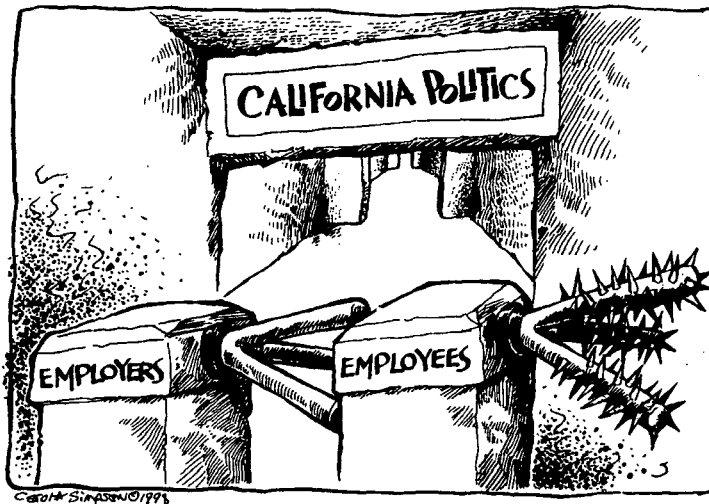
If Proposition 226 passes in June, it will have far-reaching consequences. The bureaucratic process for regulating political donations could not possibly be in place by November, effectively barring labor contributions in the general election. Without labor involvement,

voters will be more likely to elect another Republican governor and return control of the state legislature to Republicans for the first time in decades. The winners in November will oversee redistricting after the 2000 census, which could ensure Republican domination of California well into the next century.

To make matters worse, Proposition 226 appears on the ballot with Proposition 227, an initiative to abolish bilingual education.

Both measures—which are well ahead in the polls—are expected to draw large numbers of conservative voters on election day.

In response, a campaign to defeat Proposition 226 has been launched by the California Labor Federation, which successfully fended off efforts to gut the state's health and safety regulations and fought Wilson's recent attempt to abolish the eight-hour day. The AFL-CIO has earmarked \$8 million toward the effort and intends to send organizers from around the country to campaign on the ground. The state teachers unions and the Los Angeles Labor Federation are joining forces with community groups opposed to Proposition 227. To stand a chance of defeating both initiatives, these two constituencies must campaign together. ■



Orange County. They drafted the initiative as a form of revenge against teachers unions, which were the key force behind the defeat of a 1993 school-voucher initiative.

Although these men are small players on the statewide political scene, the initiative is supported by the conservative elite at both the state and national levels. Governor Pete Wilson is the honorary chairman of the campaign, and personally appealed to voters to sign petitions to get the measure on the ballot. J. Patrick Rooney, CEO of Golden Rule Insurance, and a close associate of House Speaker Newt Gingrich, donated \$50,000 to the campaign. Another \$50,000 was donated by Grover Norquist, head of Americans for Tax Reform, a right-wing group dedicated to eliminating income taxes, unions, Social Security and Medicare. Norquist

# Defending the *Defender*

BY FREDRICK L. MCKISSACK JR.

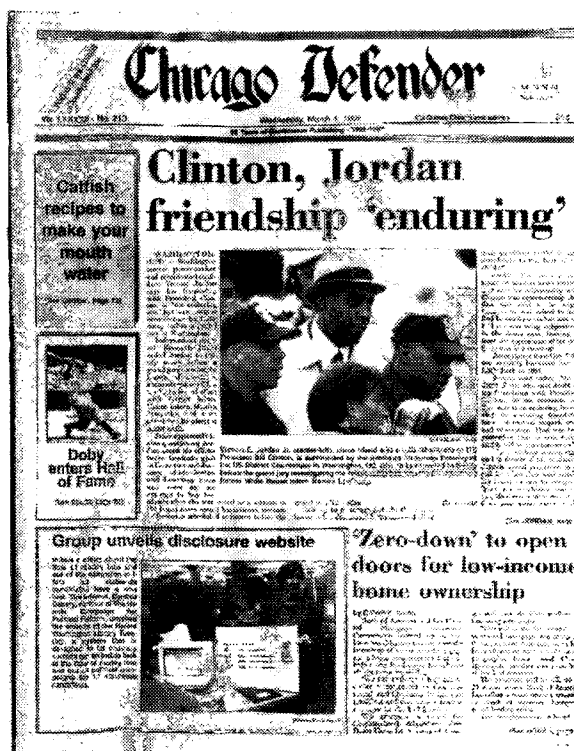
When John Sengstacke died last May, after more than 50 years as publisher of the *Chicago Defender*, one of the last great black-owned, big-city daily newspapers went up for sale. Speculation that the *Defender* would be sold to a white-owned company angered many in the black community.

Many African-Americans say that a profit-driven, white-owned corporation would threaten the independence of the *Defender*, which is one of only two black-owned daily newspapers in the United States. "The *Defender's* value as an institution is more symbolic," says Charles Whitaker, a journalism professor at Northwestern University, noting that dwindling circulation has lessened the paper's impact. "Simply on philosophical grounds, the sale of the *Defender* would be looked at as another black institution that has passed to white hands."

Sengstacke left his holdings in a trust controlled by the Northern Trust Company. Just weeks after his death, Northern announced that it would sell the *Defender* and its three sister weeklies—Memphis' *Tri-State Defender*, Detroit's *Michigan Chronicle* and the *Pittsburgh Courier*—to the highest bidder. Analysts estimate that Sengstacke Enterprises could fetch as much as \$10 million.

Bemoaning the loss of a "sacred institution," leaders in the black community scrambled to find a new group of African-American investors. One of the most vocal critics of the sale was Myiti Sengstacke, the publisher's granddaughter, who is believed to be one of the six beneficiaries of the trust. In February, a majority of the Sengstacke family voted to remove Northern as trustee, putting the sale of the paper on hold at least temporarily. The future of the *Defender* remains unclear.

The *Defender* was founded in 1905



The *Chicago Defender*, founded in 1905, is one of only two black-owned daily newspapers in the United States.

the *Defender* still offers a unique perspective for the black community, it no longer has the respect among a broad audience of black readers that it had 30 years ago, Whitaker says.

The *Defender's* circulation problems are part of a national trend among black-owned newspapers. According to the National Newspaper Publishers Association, a trade organization repre-

senting over 200 black-owned publications, 90 percent of black households subscribed to a black-owned newspaper in 1950. Today, only a third do. Part of the problem is a loss of credibility. Nationally, black newspapers have received poor marks for their writing, editing, production and design.

Nonetheless, Scott says the paper is in good shape and that there is no threat of it closing, though he concedes that rumors of a sale have taken their toll on the editorial staff. He insists that the squabble between Northern Trust and the Sengstacke family will only help the *Defender*. "We need to take real advantage of this notoriety to push the paper," he says. "When you're hot, you're hot. And right now, we're hot. We're going to continue publishing and let the rest take care of itself." ■

Fredrick L. McKissack Jr. is a writer living in Chicago.

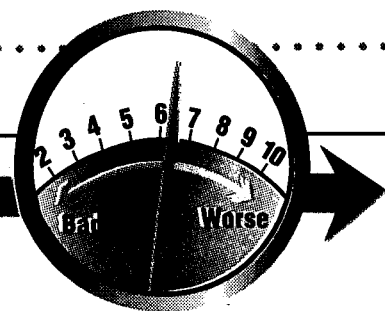
by Robert S. Abbott, a son of slaves who became one of the country's first black millionaires. In 1915, it had a circulation of 230,000, which dropped to 73,000 by 1935. Sengstacke, who was Abbott's nephew, inherited control in 1940 and quickly became one of the most influential members of the black media. "I was going over some photographs a couple of days ago and ran across photos of him with five or six presidents," says Eugene Scott, the paper's general manager. "There is a great deal of history here."

Under Sengstacke's leadership, the *Defender* was a strong advocate for the integration of the armed forces, the end of homeowner covenants in Chicago and civil rights. But as the mainstream media hired more African-Americans and began to target black readers, the circulation and influence of the *Defender* dwindled. Today, the paper's daily circulation has fallen to 25,000. While

# appall-o-meter

BY DAVID FUTRELLE

The In These Times Index of Indecencies



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## Senior Skin 7.2

Nilo Silvi, an apparently well-preserved 83-year-old Italian pensioner, is preparing to step out of retirement to star in a pornographic film. Silvi, discovered by the film producers in a Rome disco, says he's willing to do almost anything, even group scenes. The one thing he won't

do, however, is wear a condom. "I prefer doing it without, the old-fashioned way," Silvi told *Il Messaggero*. "They've told me they are all young, healthy girls. Anyway, AIDS takes 10 years to develop. I'll die first."

## Mr. Bean 7.5

After his daughter accidentally got a bean stuck in her ear, Kenyan Stephen Muchina took her to a local clinic, where a doctor pulled it out. But when Muchina was unable to pay the full fee for bean removal right then and there, London's *Daily Telegraph* reports, the doctor pushed the bean back into her ear. The Kenya Medical Association, which notes that doctors are ethically bound to accept payments in installments, is looking into the matter. Good thing she wasn't giving birth.

## War and Remembrance 6.1

It's getting hard for even professional journalists to keep track of the names of the various wars the United States has fought in during this century. Consider this correction that *Chicago Reader* media critic Michael Miner spotted in the journalism trade magazine *Editor & Publisher*. "An article about newspapers as collectibles ... incorrectly refers to the war that the United States entered after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. It was World War II." Oh, the one after World War I and before World War III. ■

## free speech

# Beverly Nurses a Grievance with Professor

BY DEIDRE MCFADYEN

Last May, Kate Bronfenbrenner, a Cornell University labor relations professor, was invited by Congress to testify at a "Town Hall" meeting in Pittsburgh on the employment policies of Beverly Enterprises, a giant nursing-home chain that she had studied. In her seven-minute presentation, Bronfenbrenner called the company one of "the nation's most notorious labor-law violators" and noted the "extreme and consistent nature of their anti-union campaigns." No one asked her any questions, and she was not quoted in any media.

But nine months later, on February 9, Beverly filed a defamation suit in federal court against Bronfenbrenner, seeking damages of more than \$250,000. As a part of the suit, the company has requested all documents and confidential survey data relating to her research on union organizing.

The case has sent shock waves

through academia, raising issues of First Amendment rights, academic freedom and the confidentiality of research data. More than 600 scholars have signed a statement of protest, calling the suit "an insult to academic inquiry and a disgrace to the legal profession."

Bronfenbrenner, a prominent supporter of labor, is one of a handful of academics who has conducted empirical research on union organizing. "It's important for academics to be in the field monitoring corporate behavior," says Julius Getman, a law professor at the University of Texas. "This lawsuit is an attempt to seal off an unsavory area of practice from scholarly investigation."

Beverly has a long history of union busting and labor-law violations (see "Broken homes," July 14, 1997). The company is currently defending itself against hundreds of unfair labor practice complaints before the National Labor Relations Board.

Hugh Reilly, who is chief counsel for labor and employment at Beverly and has close ties to the anti-union National Right to Work Committee, declined to comment on the substance of the case. "The salient facts will be developed [in court]," he wrote via e-mail. "It is intriguing though, that, even in the face of reading the complaint, certain 'academics' leap to Ms. Bronfenbrenner's defense. Makes one wonder about the state of academia where, we thought, *a priori* judgments were not encouraged."

Most observers say that regardless of the verdict, the company has already won by chilling debate. "This suit is pure intimidation," says Clyde Summers, a law professor at the University of Pennsylvania who gave testimony at the same public meeting. "The company hopes that academics will become afraid to speak out. Someone with deep pockets can absolutely terrorize people without the resources to defend themselves." ■



labor

# Wage War

BY JIM YOUNG

Ever since President Clinton announced in his State of the Union Address that he wants to raise the minimum wage by a dollar, conservative politicians, pundits and economists have been lining up a Pat Buchanan-like defense of the working poor, boldly—and disingenuously—predicting that such a proposal will hurt the very people it purports to help.

Clinton's plan, which was introduced as legislation in March by Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Rep. David Bonior (D-Mich.), would raise the current minimum wage of \$5.15 by 50 cents in each of the next two years. Supporters say it would boost the annual pay of 12 million workers to \$12,792—still about \$500 below the current poverty level for a family of three.

Right-wingers decried the proposal, charging that it would force layoffs of low-wage workers and more quietly complaining that it would pinch profits. In February, House Speaker Newt Gingrich told a U.S. Chamber of Commerce luncheon that a wage hike would “simply increase the number of unemployed black and Hispanic teenagers.”

Conservative economists, like Raymond Keating of the Small Business Survival Committee, predict small businesses will avoid hiring low-skilled workers, opting instead to automate “where possible” and to hire high-skilled, “more efficient” workers. “People at the lower end of the economic scale, those trying to find a job and get on the first rung of the ladder,” Keating says, “will find that the rung has been knocked off.”

But Jared Bernstein of the Economic Policy Institute says that the hike is too modest to provoke job loss. In fact, he says, the real value of the current minimum wage has deteriorated since its high point in 1968, when it was worth \$6.81 in 1997 dollars. The decline was especially steep and steady in the '80s,

when inflation eroded the real minimum wage by approximately 30 percent. The proposed hike will only partially restore the minimum wage to its previous value.

When the minimum wage was last increased by 90 cents in August 1996, conservatives also warned that it would have a devastating impact on jobs. But according to White House statistics, jobs are being created at a record pace, while unemployment—now at 4.7 percent—has fallen to its lowest level in 25 years. Moreover, there are at least two dozen recent empirical studies showing that moderate increases in the minimum wage do not have a significant effect on employment.

Passage of the wage hike, however, will ultimately depend on politics, not economics, and conservatives are gearing up for the fight. The Chamber of Commerce has made stopping the minimum-wage increase one of its top legislative priorities for 1998 as part of its program to “hold unions and their leaders in check.” Other trade associations, like the National Association of Manufacturers, and an array of conservative think tanks, including the American Enterprise Institute, are also in battle mode.

Meanwhile, the AFL-CIO says it will push hard for the proposal, drawing resources from a 1998 “political mobilization” fund of \$15 million. The federation's political strategy has not been lost on politicians considering whether or not to support a wage hike. The federation says it will back Republican candidates who support labor, a departure from its 1996 goal of “taking back the House” for the Democrats. That year, 160 Republicans in the House and 27 in the Senate voted to raise the minimum wage. Whether Republicans will vote again with labor is unclear.

Of course, there is more than partisan warfare at stake. In a country where only 14.1 percent of the work force belongs to a union, the minimum wage provides an important floor for earnings. “Many workers have little or no power to bargain with their employer for higher wages,” Bernstein says. “The minimum wage is a vital policy tool to make sure that such workers have at least a fighting chance to get their fair share of growing prosperity.” ■

*Jim Young is a freelance labor writer based in New York.*



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# Press Press

## District of Contempt

BY JOHN PALATTELLA

Soft money, zealously sought by dozens of senators hours after they killed the McCain-Feingold campaign-finance reform bill, is not the least of the outrages in Washington, D.C. Consider the facts about the capital assembled by Christopher Hitchens in the March issue of *Vanity Fair*: Among other things, D.C. has a case rate for tuberculosis 50 percent above the highest rate of any state, levels of infant mortality that surpass Sri Lanka and a thoroughly incompetent police department that simply "lost" 7 percent of its police cars. The villain here (and with Hitchens, there is always a villain) is Mayor Marion Barry, who has presided over the district's unraveling for 15 of the past 19 years. Hitchens notes that the annual flight of 10,000 mostly African-American residents from the city punctures the liberal shibboleth that poor blacks will "accept rot and misery and sordid private enrichment as long as it comes from 'one of their own.'" Under the control of Barry and his cronies, Hitchens opines, D.C. has come to stand for "District of Contempt"—a city with nothing but disdain for its citizens.

Hitchens' muckraking piece follows in the tradition of newspaperman George Seldes. During his remarkable 80-year career, Seldes endeavored to keep citizens informed of the facts—and railed against any person, institution or publication that covered them up. Seldes, who died in 1995 at the age of 104, is the subject of *Tell the Truth and Run*, a 1996 documentary by Rick Goldsmith currently airing on public television stations nationwide. (Check local listings for dates and times.)

Both a biography and tribute to Seldes, the documentary features archival film clips, more than 500 newspaper headlines, photographs and arti-

cles, and interviews with media historians and journalists, including Seldes himself. In one of the film's best episodes, Seldes regales Goldsmith with stories about *In Fact*, a newsweekly that Seldes published in New York City in the '40s. Seldes broke stories that the mogul-operated dailies in New York and Chicago wouldn't touch. His biggest scoop ran in 1941, when he exposed medical reports linking cigarette smoking to heart and lung disease.

Judging by its premier issue, *New Labor Forum* is positioning itself to be an independent and critical outpost of a resurgent labor movement. Published semiannually by the Labor Resource Center of Queens College, the journal offers a lively mix of material, from hard-nosed reflections about labor's past to case studies of contemporary labor relations and union-building efforts. Thomas Sugrue's account of how racism hamstrung labor politics in postwar Detroit is a cautionary tale for those trying to organize the new urban working class, which is more racially diverse than ever. Elsewhere in the issue, William Milberg and Bruce Elm-slie discuss the political obstacles to linking free trade with international labor standards. "If labor standards are a way of lowering import penetration

by developing countries, and thus saving U.S. jobs at the price of job losses and slower economic growth in the developing world, then the policy must be rethought, on the grounds of both principle and pragmatism," they argue. To get developing countries on board, the authors suggest using a tax on international capital transactions to compensate them for the drop in exports.

Anyone who breathed a sigh of relief after February's anthrax scare should hold their breath. The March/April issue of *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* contains an alarming article by Jose Vigar about the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons among terrorist groups. Though Vigar sidesteps the role that the United States has played in the proliferation of chemical weapons, he provides a sobering account of the different kinds of chemical weapons available. Not only are chemical weapons easier to manufacture than nuclear weapons, but it seems that the collapse of the Soviet Union has created a market of unemployed Dr. Strangeloves willing to sell their secrets to any terrorist group that can pay the price. ■

**John Palatella** is an editor of *University Business*.

### online

- *Adbusters* is a quarterly 'zine dedicated to stopping the "marketing pollutants in our mental environment." At its Web site ([www.adbusters.org](http://www.adbusters.org)), one of the best-designed political sites on the Net, these self-proclaimed "culture jammers" preview upcoming issues, spar with media mogul Conrad Black and *Harper's* editor Lewis Lapham, and showcase their finest ad spoofs and TV "uncommercials."
- More than 18,000 humanities texts are archived on the Carnegie Mellon English Server, an online co-operative at the Pittsburgh university. The contents ([english-www.hss.cmu.edu](http://english-www.hss.cmu.edu)) run the gamut from vegetarian recipes to Marxist theory. The server also hosts a number of electronic publications, including the political 'zine *Bad Subjects* and a journal of contemporary art and cultural theory called *Cultronix*.

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## labor

# The Dog Ate My Contract

BY MATHEW SOMLAI

**P**ublic schools in Racine, Wis., were shut down for almost a week in February when hundreds of teachers played hooky.

More than 400 teachers, who have been working without a contract for five years, called in sick on February 16 after negotiations between the school board and the Racine Education Association reached an impasse. The "flu" spread over the next few days, effectively shutting down 18 of the 33 schools in the district. The school board responded by locking out all teachers and support staff on February 20. Twenty-one thousand students were told to stay home.

The school board then threatened to seek an injunction against the teachers who participated in the "sick-out," since Wisconsin law prohibits teachers from walking off the job. Facing the prospect of fines or firing, the teachers quietly returned to work on February 25.

The state legislature prohibited teachers from striking after a series of walk-outs in the state during the '70s, including a 50-day strike in Racine in 1977. To resolve contract disputes, Wisconsin installed an arbitration system. Under that system, when negotiations reached an impasse, the final contract decision was turned over to an arbitrator whose ruling was binding. "During that period, the vast majority of contracts were settled voluntarily without the need of an arbitrator," says Terry Craney, president of the Wisconsin Education Association Council, adding that even when arbitration was necessary, the system encouraged reasonable offers from both sides.

But in 1993, Republican Gov. Tommy Thompson and the state legislature

## left politics

# Don't Call It a Comeback

BY JOEL BLEIFUSS

**A** couple of months ago, reeling from a series of campaign-finance scandals, the Democratic Party was mired in debt. But capitalizing on Clinton's unexpectedly astronomical approval ratings in the wake of his sex scandal, the Democrats are beginning to rake in campaign contributions and get back on track for the November elections.

They're not uncorking the champagne yet, but Democrats say their party now has a very good chance at retaking the House. "This may be the one mid-term election when presidential coattails actually work," says Amy Isaacs, national director of Americans for Democratic Action, a national organization of liberal Democrats. "President Clinton's State of the Union message carried good, solid, traditional liberal messages, which have clearly resonated with the public."

But to regain control of the House this fall, Democrats need a net gain of 11 seats. There are 18 open seats (10 of them currently held by Republicans) where the outcome is a toss-up and at least 32 races where the Republican incumbent is vulnerable, according to the Democratic Congressional Committee. The key to a Democratic upset, however, lies in the West, where Democrats are early favorites for a dozen seats now held by Republicans.

Three races stand out in particular. In Washington's 3rd District, Rep. Linda Smith, a leader of the freshman class of 1994, opted to run for Senate rather than endure a rematch with Brian Baird. Baird, a college professor and liberal Democrat, lost to Smith by fewer than a thousand votes in 1996. Rep. Helen Chenoweth, the maven of Idaho's far right, is facing a difficult battle in the primary. If she survives, she will face Dan Williams—a wealthy, moderate Democrat—for the second time in November. In New Mexico's 3rd District around Santa Fe, Rep. Bill Redmond, who won with only 43 percent of the vote in 1996, will likely face both New Mexico Attorney General Tom Udall and Green Party standard bearer Carol Miller. In this solidly Democratic district, the race hinges on whether the two candidates on the left will once again split the vote. ■

fixed what wasn't broken, replacing arbitration with the Qualified Economic Offer (QEO). Now, when negotiations break down, the QEO automatically kicks in. It mandates an annual salary increase of 2.1 percent and a small increase in benefits during a given contract period.

The new system places teachers at a huge disadvantage during contract negotiations. Teachers cannot get larger salary increases without major concessions because school boards can always fall back on the QEO. "It's not a glass ceiling, it's a brick wall," Craney says. "The QEO isn't a rational and reasonable way to settle contracts. It's an

unjust, bad law."

Frustration among teachers is growing from Appleton to Wausau. Teachers in 167 Wisconsin districts—nearly 40 percent of state schools—are currently working without a contract. Craney says he expects to see more protests in other districts across the state.

But in Racine, where negotiations continue, the teachers have little public support. "The public outcry against the teachers has been disheartening," says Tony Pavao, who has taught in the Racine schools for 21 years. "Teachers are saying that Racine has given up and that the district is going the way of the dinosaur." ■

# The Headaches of Empire

BY JUAN GONZALEZ

**N**early 100 years after Puerto Rico became a territory of the United States, Congress may finally decide to allow the island's 3.8 million inhabitants to determine their own political future.

After a furious debate that split both Democrats and Republicans into unusual blocs, the House of Representatives approved by a razor-thin 209-to-208 margin a far-reaching bill sponsored by Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska) that authorizes a plebiscite on the island in December. Puerto Ricans will choose among three options: statehood, commonwealth or "separate sovereignty." The bill, however, still has to clear the Senate, which will be tough.

Young's plebiscite plan differs significantly from status referendums held in Puerto Rico in 1967 and 1993 because it gives clear options and has some real enforcement power. In the previous votes, both of which commonwealth supporters won, the choices were not as clearly defined and Congress did not agree to abide by the results. Thus, those referendums resembled meaningless beauty contests.

Although Puerto Rico has been a possession of the United States since 1898, when U.S. troops seized the island during the Spanish-American War, only in recent years has Washington admitted that the island remains this country's largest and oldest colony.

Congress declared Puerto Ricans citizens in 1917, despite overwhelming opposition from the island's legislature, where pro-independence or autonomist leaders held a majority.

For the first half of this century, presidents appointed American governors who ruled with dictatorial power. U.S. sugar companies gobbled up the best lands, paid their workers starvation wages, and made off with fortunes.

Luis Muñoz Marín, who became the island's first elected governor in 1948, devised the idea of commonwealth, whereby Puerto Ricans would run most local affairs. In a 1952 plebiscite, islanders were given a choice between remaining a colony or becoming a commonwealth. Supporters of independence were subjected to widespread persecution.

When the voters approved commonwealth status, the United States promptly told the United Nations that the island had achieved self-rule. This, of course, was a lie. Congress still retained the power to change any laws in Puerto Rico, draft Puerto Ricans to fight in American wars, or even take away

American citizenship.

From the '50s to the '70s, Puerto Rico became a Cold War fortress for U.S. military bases, an off-shore source of cheap labor for American manufacturers, and a tax haven where corporations shielded as much as \$4 billion a year from their federal income taxes. At the same time, however, 60 percent of its people lived in poverty.

The end of the Cold War and the rise of even cheaper labor pools in Third World countries rendered Puerto Rico, the colony, obsolete. Like the slaveholder who tires of paying the upkeep for his slaves, Congress realizes it must do something about Puerto Rico's drain on the federal treasury. Statehood

**The rise of cheaper labor sources has rendered Puerto Rico, the colony, obsolete.**

would put an end to the tax breaks that U.S. corporations on the island currently enjoy. While the initial federal costs of statehood would be greater, since a Puerto Rican state would be the poorest in the union, the long-term costs would be far less as income on the island rises. Thus, the Young bill suddenly recognizes that "the people of Puerto Rico have not been formally consulted by the United States of America as to their ultimate political status."

The bill has the backing of Speaker Newt Gingrich as well as President Bill Clinton, but is bitterly opposed by the Republican Party's extreme right and by two of the House's most liberal Puerto Rican members—Nydia Velázquez (D-N.Y.) and Luis Gutierrez (D-Ill.).

Gingrich and Clinton, both realists, fear alienating the growing bloc of Latino voters in the United States. Velázquez and Gutierrez oppose the bill because they believe Young's definitions of status rigged the vote for statehood.

Some Republicans oppose the bill because statehood for Puerto Rico would sharply alter the political landscape in Washington, D.C. Puerto Rico, after all, has a bigger population than 26 of the 50 states. If admitted to the union, islanders would elect two senators and six or seven representatives, probably all Democrats since both major political parties on the island have close ties to the Democratic Party.

Ultra-conservatives like Pat Buchanan and Phyllis Schlafly think the United States should just cut Puerto Rico loose, unilaterally granting it independence. But all recent polls show that independence is supported by less than 10 percent of Puerto Ricans. After 100 years of convincing Puerto Ricans that U.S. citizenship is a great blessing, Washington has a problem—most Puerto Ricans believe it. ■



BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

# Louis Farrakhan's NEW SONG

*The Nation of Islam's leader tones down his rhetoric*

**A**n enthusiastic, overwhelmingly black group of nearly 20,000 people filled the cavernous halls of Chicago's McCormick Place on February 22 for the Nation of Islam's annual Savior's Day commemoration. The crowd was on hand to greet Min. Louis Farrakhan, who was making his first public appearance since returning from a two-month, 37-nation world tour. Seated among the honored guests were Kwame Ture (formerly Stokely Carmichael), president of the All African People's Revolutionary Party, and Jude Wanniski, the supply-side economics guru and former *Wall Street Journal* editorial writer. The two sat at opposite ends of the stage, but came for the same reason: to show their admiration for the Nation of Islam's controversial leader.

This ecumenical appeal reveals two facets of Farrakhan's emerging new public identity. As he moves away from the crude skin nationalism that made him famous, the 64-year-old leader hopes to be seen not merely as the leader of a U.S.-based race-cult but as an international Islamic and anticolonialist spokesman. In order to pull this off, Farrakhan has significantly reinterpreted NOI doctrine, moving it away from its foundation in anti-white racism and closer to orthodox Islam.

This is a difficult feat, especially if Farrakhan does not want to alienate those NOI purists who hold fast to the group's racial determinism. Since its founding by W.D. Fard in the early '30s, the Nation of Islam has preached that Caucasians were created to bedevil the planet and that black people are inherently divine. After Fard's mysterious disappearance in 1934, his lieutenant "Messenger" Elijah Muhammad elaborated this doctrine. Muhammad maintained tight control of the NOI until his own death in 1975. Farrakhan, who had become the Messenger's representative after the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, took over leadership of the Nation of Islam soon after Muhammad's death. For many years, Farrakhan's legitimacy as a spokesman depended on his fidelity

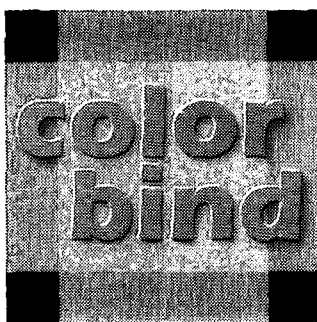
to the NOI's bizarre catechism.

What's more, Farrakhan has occasionally made statements that echo classic anti-Semitism. While two of his most frequently criticized quotes (about Judaism being a "gutter religion" and Hitler being a "great man") were taken out of context, Farrakhan has often flaunted his disdain for Jewish sensibilities. And some of his criticisms of international finance sound disturbingly similar to those made by neofascists. In February 1995, for example, he blamed "Jewish and non-Jewish financiers" for provoking international conflicts in order to reap profits—charges that could have been lifted directly from the tracts of right-wing militias.

Despite the success of his October 16, 1995, Million Man March, Farrakhan is a controversial figure within the black community as well. Christianity is still influential in black America, and many African-Americans are turned off by Farrakhan's commitment to Islam. Others reject the Nation of Islam for its idiosyncratic interpretation of Islam and its strident black nationalism. Still others blame the group for the death of Malcolm X. Black progressives criticize the NOI for its theocratic (and patriarchal) world view and its authoritarian mode of operation.

But now, it seems, Farrakhan is willing to change the orientation of the Nation of Islam to appeal to some of its black critics. The man who once pushed the cultist belief that God, in the Person of Master Fard Muhammad, chose Elijah Muhammad as His "last messenger" has embraced a more orthodox interpretation of Islam. His group, which once prided itself on political quiescence, is now leading voter-registration drives and sponsoring political education classes. A leader who once taught a eugenic doctrine of black divinity and white depravity, and who denounced the feminist movement as a satanic plot, is now preaching a different theme.

Domestically, Farrakhan is now focusing on the NOI's role as a mediator within the black community. Could anyone but Farrakhan have won the allegiance of the Crips and the



**Louis Farrakhan (right) shakes hands with Libya's permanent U.N. representative after a March 4 press conference at the United Nations.**

Bloods street gangs in Los Angeles or the Folks and Peoples factions in Chicago, as he did during the gang truce movement of the early '90s? Last year, he also played a crucial role in squashing the beef between East Coast and West Coast rappers by hosting hip-hop luminaries from each coast at his lavish digs. In 1997, he joined forces with Ed Rendell, the white mayor of Philadelphia, to ease racial tensions in that city. And, of course, the Million Man March was an orgy of strange bedfellows.

Meanwhile, Farrakhan is making a bolder attempt to unite disparate African-American Islamic groups. In his Savior's Day speech, he reached out to his old rival

Imam Warithuddine Mohamed, the son of Elijah Muhammad. "Imam Warithuddine Mohamed, I'm coming after you," Farrakhan told the audience. "Let's go in a room and close the damn door and then come out arm-and-arm like we're supposed to. ... I look like a fool going around the world seeking peace and reconciliation and don't have it in my own house."

In the '70s, Mohamed (he changed the spelling of his last name to distance himself from his father's teachings) transformed the group he inherited from his father into a more orthodox Islamic organization. Farrakhan initially pledged fealty but soon abandoned the project. Later, he resurrected the Nation of Islam as a separate organization based on Elijah's race-based doctrine. Ironically, Farrakhan is now attempting some of the changes that he originally opposed and Mohamed supported—although the current transition from Elijah's teachings to international Islam has been much more gradual than the one Mohamed tried to accomplish.

Last July, Farrakhan convened an International Islamic Conference in Chicago as part of a larger attempt to gain theological legitimacy. In a speech at the event, he identified "racism, sexism, materialism, inordinate nationalism,

immorality, vice, decadence and corruption" as the "major illnesses of the world." He prescribed Abrahamic scripture (the Qur'an, the Torah and the Gospels) as the medicine for those afflictions. This is a far cry from the NOI leader who once urged black Americans to shun "Arabicized Islam" and regularly denounced "handkerchief-headed, Negro preachers" of Christianity.

Meanwhile, in an effort to internationalize his religious leadership, Farrakhan embarked in 1995 on what he called a "world friendship tour" of several foreign countries, including Iran, Libya and other places that the State Department has labeled "pariah" nations. Continuing to cultivate his new global links, he later visited several countries in western Africa and the Caribbean (including Nigeria and Cuba). Last December, he began his latest trip, "World Friendship Tour III." Some critics accused Farrakhan of caving with dictators instead of attempting religious outreach. They say he embraced the Sani Abacha regime in Nigeria and did not



AFP/DON EMMERT

*Farrakhan is moving Nation of Islam doctrine away from its foundation in anti-white racism and closer to orthodox Islam.*



speak forcefully enough against slavery in Mauritania and Sudan.

The tour proved that Farrakhan does command respect outside the Nation of Islam and around the world. "I met with 13 heads of state during my tour and dozens of other governmental leaders," he said in a recent interview with *In These Times*. "We were treated as if we were heads of state in most of the nations we visited."

He returned firing away at U.S. foreign policy. At a February 20 news conference outside of the NOI's headquarters in Chicago, Farrakhan called the Clinton administration's position toward Iraq "cowardly." He called on Saddam Hussein to submit to United Nations-mandated weapons inspections, but he urged U.S. policy-makers to seek diplomacy rather than "the use of inordinate force." On February 22, he was even more forthright in his denunciation of U.S. policy, blasting Secretary of State Madeleine Albright as "all dull and all wrong" about the "insanity of bombing Iraq."

He also attacked the role that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank play in international affairs. In some African countries, he said, "The whole country is working for the IMF and the World Bank, and behind the loan is America buying the leadership. Africa is enslaved by debt and the IMF is the new slave maker." These latest attacks are less burdened with the fascist associations of his past comments about international lenders and more in tune with progressive critiques of IMF and World Bank policies.

But Farrakhan's speech illustrates that he still poses an even broader dilemma for progressives. While his diagnoses are often on-target, his theocratic prescriptions often seem as odious as the problem. "A nation committed to obedience to God is the only force that will destroy the world serpent," he says.

And then there are the contradictions that cloud Farrakhan's message and inspire distrust. At the Savior's Day speech, for example, Farrakhan argued that "if the Muslim world decided to tie their currencies to gold ... they could probably break the back of these world serpents." But just as his diatribe against international capitalists hit full-throttle, a small group of female NOI officials entered the hall, lavishly attired in mink, lynx and sable coats. It is hard to denounce materialism when your own acolytes exemplify conspicuous consumption.

And if racism is one of the world's greatest problems, why is Farrakhan so equivocal when pressed to explain the eugenic doctrine at the NOI's core? Last April, *Meet The Press* host Tim Russert asked Farrakhan if he actually believed that white people are blue-eyed devils. Farrakhan answered, "Well, you have not been saints in the way you have acted toward the darker peoples of the world and even your own people. But, in truth, Mr. Russert, any human being who gives themselves over to the doing of evil could be considered a devil."

Meanwhile, Farrakhan has to be careful not to provoke charges of revisionism from hard-core Elijah "fundamentalists," which could create dangerous levels of internal dissent. He walks a thin line between doctrinal fidelity and wider recognition.

But even with his growing international stature, many still dismiss Farrakhan as a marginal cult figure. That would be a mistake. "Can you tell me another black person who is accorded such global deference?" he asks. "And my authority is purely independent, it doesn't derive from any white power structure of any kind. It comes from my people; it comes from Allah." Those are not just delusions of grandeur. Farrakhan has become the most globally renowned black leader since W.E.B. Du Bois and Malcolm X in the '60s.

As he moves NOI doctrine away from its insurgent, racist origins, Farrakhan hopes to energize the creed with a new global mission. Any Muslim government that allies with the United States against Iraq, he argues, is in store for revolution. He urges his followers to organize against the United States' errant foreign policy. "We must end the blockade on Cuba, Libya, Iraq and the Sudan," he says. "Don't say it can't be done. Let's take on the government."

All of Farrakhan's recent moves are major deviations from the counsel of Elijah Muhammad, who urged his followers to maintain a low profile while preaching a militantly racist doctrine about blue-eyed devils. Farrakhan has downplayed the racism in NOI doctrine, substituting anticolonial activism and domestic Republicanism. It's an interesting equation and a good trick. Anyone who could attract Wanniski, Ture, representatives of the Unification church, former Black Panther Geronimo Pratt and Lyndon La Rouché confidant James Bevel to the same stage—as Farrakhan did—has an ecumenical appeal worthy of attention. And we should pay more careful attention. ■

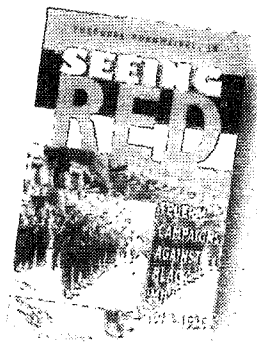
## "SEEING RED"

*Federal Campaigns against  
Black Militancy, 1919-1925*

Theodore Kornweibel, Jr.

For several years after World War I, any African Americans who spoke out forcefully for their race—editors, union organizers, civil rights advocates, political activists, and Pan-Africanists—were likely to be investigated by a network of federal intelligence agencies. For this gripping account of a neglected, shameful chapter of American political intelligence, Theodore Kornweibel has uncovered much new material, including the identities of black informers and agent provocateurs.

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BY JOEL BLEIFUSS

# THE CATTLEMEN'S *beef with Oprah*

**O**prah Winfrey's victory over the Texas cattlemen who sued her for disparaging American beef was a resounding triumph for freedom of speech. On February 26, a federal jury in Amarillo, Texas, cleared Winfrey of liability for statements that she and guest Howard Lyman made on her television talk show. The case highlighted the idiocy—and danger—of the so-called “veggie libel” laws that corporate interests have foisted on 13 states, including Texas, in a rearguard effort to shield agriculture from health-conscious critics. As Winfrey said as she stepped outside the Amarillo courthouse, “Free speech not only lives, it rocks!”

Lost in the hoopla of the six-week trial, though, was the meat of the matter: whether Winfrey and Lyman, the Humane Society's Eating with a Conscience program director, were right to suggest that an outbreak of a “mad cow”-type disease was a threat to the American public. Most of the media have concluded that regardless of Winfrey's rights, mad cow is simply not possible in the United States. As a *Chicago Tribune* editorial concluded, “The First Amendment was meant to assure a free press. But the Winfrey case should be a reminder that a wise press will use that freedom responsibly.”

It didn't help that Federal District Judge Mary Lou Robinson did her best to stifle press coverage of the trial, banning cameras and recording devices from the courtroom, limiting the number of press seats, and refusing to make a transcript of the proceedings available until after the trial concluded. She also placed a gag order on the plaintiffs, the defendants and their attorneys. One of the few sources of news about the ins-and-outs of the trial were reports by Chip Chandler and Kay Ledbetter in the *Amarillo Globe-News*.

**T**he Winfrey case began in March 1996, when British authorities realized that the country's mad cow epidemic had spread to humans. Since 1995, this human form of mad cow disease, new-variant Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease (CJD), has claimed the lives of 23 people. (How many Britons will ultimately die from the disease is not yet known, since its incubation time in humans can stretch to more than 20 years.)

The disease was transmitted from cow to cow through high-protein feed supplements derived from the rendered remains of infected cattle. The humans with CJD contracted the disease from eating infected meat.

On April 16, 1996, *The Oprah Winfrey Show* ran a program devoted to food safety, in which mad cow was among the topics covered. Winfrey's guests included Gary Weber, a former Department of Agriculture (USDA) official who now works for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Will Hueston, then with the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and Lyman, a former rancher. Lyman asserted that

Americans were endangered by the practice, widespread among American ranchers, of feeding dead cows to other cows. His exchange with Winfrey went as follows:

**Winfrey:** You said this disease could make AIDS look like the common cold.

**Lyman:** Absolutely.

**Winfrey:** That's an extreme statement you know. ...

**Lyman:** We're following exactly the same path that they followed in England—ten years of dealing with it as public relations rather than

doing something substantial about it. 100,000 cows per year in the United States are fine at night, dead in the morning. The majority of those cows are rounded up, ground up, fed back to other cows. If only one of them has mad cow disease, it has the potential to affect thousands.

**Winfrey:** But cows are herbivores. They shouldn't be eating other cows.

**Lyman:** That's exactly right. ... We should have them eating grass, not other cows. We've not only turned them into carnivores, we've turned them into cannibals. ...

**Winfrey:** It has just stopped me cold from eating another burger. I'm stopped.

The day the show aired, the price of cattle on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange dropped by 2.5 percent to a 10-year low. The cattle industry was up in arms.

Texas Agriculture Commissioner Rick Perry asked attorney general to sue Lyman under a 1995 Texas law that made it illegal to knowingly disseminate any false information “that





states or implies that the perishable food product is not safe for consumption by the public." On May 28, 1996, Paul and Mike Engler, owners of Cactus Feeders, Inc., one of the largest cattle feedlot operations in the world, beat Perry to the punch. The Englers filed a civil suit against Winfrey, her production company and Lyman, charging that *Oprah* "allowed anti-meat activists to present biased, unsubstantiated and irresponsible claims against beef—not only damaging the beef industry, but also placing a tremendous amount of unwarranted fear in the public." The Englers claimed that they had lost \$10.3 million as a result of the broadcast.

On January 22, the case went to trial before Judge Robinson in Amarillo. The plaintiffs set out to refute Lyman's charges that current agricultural practices endanger Americans and to prove that Winfrey and Lyman knowingly lied about the safety of American beef. Winfrey's lawyers, meanwhile, challenged the cattleman's science, trying to prove that their clients did not act with reckless disregard for the truth.

As it turned out, testimony by the plaintiffs and their witnesses proved that Winfrey's show was, by and large, on the mark. Bill O'Brien, the managing partner of Texas Beef Producers, told jurors that the program was misleading. "You had a video of cattle falling down, ... boom, boom, scary music in the background, sound bites of inaccurate information and Oprah over there cheer-leading it on." But the defense produced a letter from O'Brien to the Texas Cattlemen's Beef Association, in which he prepared the group for "the likely discovery of a BSE animal in the U.S. cattle herd." Questioned about the letter on the stand, O'Brien claimed that "likely" was a typo. So defense lawyers confronted him with another portion of the memo, in which O'Brien had written that "one opinion shared by most respected experts is the likelihood" that BSE could develop sporadically. This time, O'Brien admitted that the sentence was typographically correct.

Co-plaintiff Mike Engler tried to dispute Lyman's assertion that in the United States "cows are eating other cows." Engler explained to the jury that until this practice was prohibited last August, Texas cattlemen would regularly feed their cows rendered cows in the form of a feed additive. But he told the court that eating the rendered bone and meat from ground-up cow is not the same as eating a cow.

During her own testimony, though, Winfrey pulled apart Engler's distinctions. "I have to tell ya," she said, "to me, whether it's ground hamburger, whether it's powdered, whether it's cow tea ... it's still eating ground cow." She added, "My instinct on that show told me it was unnatural to feed cows to cows and what you saw was my gut reaction."

The cattlemen's scientific firepower came from Hueston, the former USDA official, who told the jury that the episode of *Oprah* contained "false and inflammatory statements without any basis in science." Hueston, who is a long-time apolo-

gist for the USDA, which for seven years resisted regulating cow cannibalism despite warnings from its own scientists, was paid more than \$25,000 for his testimony. On the witness stand, though, Hueston admitted that his former employers at the Department of Agriculture believed that feeding cattle to cattle could touch off a BSE epidemic. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which has jurisdiction over animal feeds, finally banned the practice in June 1997. Still, Hueston equivocated, saying that "not all scientists support the ban."

Meanwhile, Winfrey attorney Charles Babcock demonstrated that cattlemen tend to support health and safety regulations on the basis of what helps their industry—not what scientists say is safe for the American public. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association, for example, withdrew its support for the ban on cow cannibalism when the FDA published its proposed guidelines in January 1997, after supporting a ban in 1996. Babcock questioned Paul Engler about the cattle industry's resistance:

**Engler:** They wanted to eliminate the word "muscle" [from the list of cow parts that could not be fed back to other cattle].

**Babcock:** You don't think those people in England got new-variant CJD from eating a brain sandwich?

**Engler:** I don't think it's been established where they got it.

**Babcock:** Or eating *creme de la eye-balls*?

"Muscle," after all, is another word for steak. And the cattlemen feared that if the government said that cows can't eat steak,

some people would think that they shouldn't either.

The defense poked enough holes in the cattlemen's science that halfway through the trial, Judge Robinson concluded that Winfrey and Lyman had not made "knowingly false" statements, forcing the plaintiffs to a fall-back position of arguing that defendants had defamed their cattle business (a much harder case to prove). That ruling was a vindication for Lyman and others who want to halt the production of unnatural food. Clearly, their science stands up under cross-examination. Consequently, though, Winfrey's lawyers never got a chance to test whether the Texas food-disparagement laws are constitutional. They remain on the books, and the next critic they strike will not have pockets as deep as Winfrey's.

And even as Winfrey celebrates her victory, unsafe and unnatural agricultural practices continue. Although the FDA banned cow cannibalism last year, the agency still allows farmers to feed their cows the rendered carcasses of non-ruminant animals such as pigs (see "This Mad Pig Went to Market," May 26, 1997). And it permits farmers to feed their pigs the rendered carcasses of pigs, cows and sheep. Since pigs, like all mammals, are able to contract mad cow-like diseases, a danger to the public health still exists. The FDA and the USDA ought to protect the public with the same zeal they currently protect the livestock industry. ■



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# The Cruellest Month

## Why Republican tax-reform schemes would make April 15 even more unfair.

By Doug Henwood

**W**ith the infamous U.S. budget deficit on the verge of turning into a surplus for the first time since 1969, Republicans now feel a new freedom to push their favorite cause: deep tax cuts, deeper than the ones baked into last year's budget deal. Deepest for the rich, of course, but since they can't say that in public, they disguise their schemes in deviously populist rhetoric.

That populist rhetoric thrives on the public's entirely justified hostility toward the current tax system, which is horrendously complicated and skewed in favor of those who can afford the best lawyers and accountants. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) can be intrusive, brutal and stupid. But resentment of the existing monstrosity shouldn't be raw material for "the greatest gift to America's wealthy in years."

That phrase comes from Republican ex-politico Bill Seidman, who was describing Jerry Brown's 1992 tax plan, which is a political ancestor of the schemes now being debated by the anti-tax crowd. Brown—whose plan was written by Arthur Laffer, the guy who drew the famous supply-side tax curve on a cocktail napkin—proposed scrapping the entire federal tax code and replacing it with a flat income tax and a value-added tax (VAT).

The two "sides" of today's Republican tax scheming have split Brown's plan in two, with one side favoring a flat income tax, and the other favoring a national sales tax, which is administratively simpler than a VAT but no less regressive. The most prominent advocates of the two sides, respectively, are Texas Rep. Dick Armey and Louisiana Rep. Billy Tauzin, who are traveling the country on their "Scrap the Code" tour, debating the merits of these two awful proposals. Their tour builds on

last year's Republican roadshow highlighting IRS abuses. Going into tax season, the Republican theme will be to scrap the code by 2001 and debate the details in the interim.

Trying to steal some of their thunder, House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) has proposed a simplification scheme that preserves progressivity. No one, however, is paying much attention to him. The White House is just interested in tinkering with taxes, and few congressional Democrats have taken up Gephardt's cause.

**A**rme y, one of the few Ph.D. economists in public life, and Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.) co-sponsored the Freedom and Fairness Restoration Act of 1997, wittily known as HR 1040. The plan would scrap the present income tax in favor of a flat tax with a large standard deduction but no more itemized write-offs. Armey promises that this would "promote freedom, fairness and economic opportunity for families by reducing the power and reach of the federal establishment." This is how the tax radicals tart up their social philosophy—19th-century free-market liberalism—with revolutionary language about toppling privilege and convention.

People seem to think the upper classes don't pay taxes at all, so a flat tax would actually get them to pay up. Although the present federal tax system does coddle the rich, it is, in fact, progressive. In 1994, the richest 1 percent of families, with pretax incomes of \$566,876, paid 33.2 percent of their income in all kinds of federal taxes (income, Social Security, excise and corporate). That's a higher tax rate than the next 4 percent (29.4 percent), whose rate is higher than the 5 percent below them (26.3 percent), and so on down through the middle fifth





The bill would also revamp the business tax code. "Because the flat tax treats all economic activity equally, it will promote greater economic efficiency and increased prosperity," Armey says in his promo materials. "When saving is no longer taxed twice, people will save and invest more, leading to higher productivity and greater take-home pay." How this would work is a bit murky. In essence, businesses would pay a flat 17 percent tax on their profits, defined as revenue less costs for wages, materials, and investments in machinery, buildings and land. They wouldn't be allowed to deduct interest payments or employee health insurance premiums, which would almost certainly result in millions of workers losing coverage or having it sharply cut back. Someone who concludes that this turn of events might be a bit of a drawback obviously hasn't read the briefing paper by Dan Mitchell, the Heritage Foundation's resident fiscal

(19.5 percent) and poorest fifth (5 percent) of the population.

Armey claims that there's no pain in his flat tax, only pleasure. But either people in middle- and lower-income brackets will get screwed to make up for the cuts given to the rich, or the government will be starved for money. Armey claimed in an interview last year that "a family of four would have to earn \$36,800 before it owed a penny of federal income tax." But the typical family of four earning \$25,000 or less already pays little or no income tax, and often gets a refund, thanks to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Armey would repeal the EITC, leaving many poor families worse off than they are now.

All income in excess of \$36,800 (or \$33,800, according to the figures on Armey's Web site) would be taxed at a flat rate of 20 percent for the first two years of the plan, and 17 percent from there to eternity. This would yield big tax cuts for the top 1 percent—a near halving of their tax bill. A family of four with \$500,000 in income now pays about \$115,130 in taxes, according to Citizens for Tax Justice (CTJ) estimates. Under Armey's scheme, this would fall to \$61,340; their tax cut alone would be fatter than the average four-person household's yearly pretax income. (CTJ is essential to anyone trying to make sense of tax politics; their Web site, [www.ctj.org](http://www.ctj.org), is a rich source of truth-telling.)

Worse, under the Armey-Shelby plan, only certain kinds of income would be taxed: wages, pensions and unemployment insurance. Interest and dividend income and capital gains would go untaxed. Since the very rich own the vast majority of capital assets, they would enjoy even deeper tax cuts than the numbers suggest at first glance.

ghoul. According to Mitchell, "One of the most desirable features of a flat tax is that workers no longer will have an incentive to use insurance to cover routine health care expenses. By helping to reduce 'third-party payments' in health care, the flat tax therefore will help to rein in health care costs." And if no one had health insurance, costs might well drop to zero!

HR 1040 would also radically shift the nature of corporate taxation. Now, firms that invest heavily in buildings and machinery deduct those capital expenditures over the course of many years. The Armey-Shelby plan would eliminate this, and have firms deduct these expenses immediately. The effect would be to boost the tax rate on capital-intensive manufacturing firms like General Motors, and cut it for ones with low capital expenditures, like ad agencies and investment banks—an anti-industrial policy if there ever was one.

Armey says his plan would result in only modest revenue losses, an argument that makes no sense on the slightest reflection. How can almost everyone but the very poorest get a tax cut—and a tax cut that rises with income, to boot—without the government taking a giant revenue hit? Clinton's Treasury Department estimates the annual revenue loss at \$186 billion, big money even for Washington. So either the spending cuts will have to be far deeper than Armey is letting on, the tax rate has to be higher, or the exemption has to be lower. There's no other mathematical possibility.

**T**o true religionists among the Republican right, though, the Armey-Shelby proposal doesn't go far enough, since it doesn't dissolve the IRS. Two other Republican representatives, Tauzin and Colorado's Dan Schaefer would do exactly

that in just three years, which is why they've numbered their bill, the National Retail Sales Tax Act, HR 2001. Tauzin and Schaefer would scrap most federal taxes (sparing the regressive Social Security payroll tax) and replace them with a single 15 percent national sales tax. Unlike the Arney-Shelby plan, whose major sin is to replace a progressive tax code with a flat one, HR 2001 would passionately embrace regressivity.

Sales taxes are the most regressive taxes of all, since rich people consume a smaller portion of their income than middle-class people, and many poor households actually consume more than their income and borrow the difference. Tauzin and Schaefer, vaguely aware of this problem, propose a rebate equal to 15 percent of poverty income for everyone. That would amount to about \$100 a month for a single person, and \$200 for a family of four. While such a rebate might offset the grossest cruelties of a national sales tax, it wouldn't address the fact that at a reasonable rate, rather than HR 2001's fantasy rate of 15 percent, all but the rich would see their federal taxes rise, not fall.

Tauzin and Schaefer set the rate at 15 percent only after using some extraordinarily creative math. In 1995, personal consumption expenditures, according to the national income accounts, were \$4.96 trillion and the taxes that Tauzin and Schaefer would abolish brought in about \$820 billion. So even the first back-of-the-envelope approximation comes up short, since 15 percent of \$4.96 trillion is \$744 billion. A rate of 17 percent would be required to match 1995's federal revenues. But things are more complicated than that, since what's classified as consumption in the national income accounts includes

lots of what the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) accountants call imputations—pleasures we enjoy without the direct exchange of cash, like living in owner-occupied housing, or visiting a public museum, or staying in a hospital when one of those cost-enhancing third-party payers is picking up the tab. Take away those imputations, which were worth \$777 billion in 1995, and the tax base shrinks by 16 percent. Take away some additional categories, such as necessities like food and clothing, and the base would shrink further, meaning a still higher tax rate. In fact, on a reasonable base, the sales tax rate would have to be well over 20 percent to match the current level of federal revenue.

Seeing the appeal of simplification, Gephardt, that supposedly great friend of the working class, has weighed in with his own plan. He would scrap all deductions except home mortgage interest (don't we renters ever get a break?), boost the standard deduction, and tax income under \$23,000 for singles or \$46,000 for married couples at a 10 percent rate. After that, rates would rise—to 20 percent on income between \$23,000 and \$40,000 for singles (\$46,000 to \$80,000 for couples), to 26 percent on income between \$40,000 and \$75,000 for singles (\$80,000 to \$150,000 for couples), and so on up to a maximum of 34 percent on income over \$137,500 for singles (over \$275,000 for couples). According to CTJ simulations, married couples in all income brackets up to \$130,000 would get tax cuts, with only the richest 1 to 2 percent paying more. And the tax return, like the Arney-Shelby plan, could fit on a postcard, which is the acid test of tax simplification these days. Though there are no rigorous revenue estimates available for the Gephardt plan, it looks a little optimistic. And it's too kind to folks with incomes in the lower six figures. But all in all, it's not a bad plan.

Right now, though, like all big ideas in an age of complacency and micropolitics, radical tax overhaul is mostly for connoisseurs. If Gephardt sticks with the plan for his own likely presidential run in 2000, his scheme may get some attention; making the rich pay more is a perpetual winner in polls. If November's election produces a larger, more manic Republican majority, then the Arney-Shelby plan may win a broader audience. No doubt the flat tax will also be a feature of the Republican primary campaign two years from now. The Tauzin-Schaefer sales tax proposal, having done its duty by shifting the debate to the right, will probably be put back on the shelf.

The stakes are great. Gephardt's scheme would slightly undo the vast polarization of incomes that has characterized the last 20 to 30 years. Both Republican plans would intensify it almost overnight. ■

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By Kim Moody

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# 'til it's over.

Workers turn down Caterpillar's UAW-approved contract offer

**O**n February 13, Caterpillar, the world's largest heavy-equipment manufacturer, thought it had a deal. Federal mediator John Calhoun Wells thought he had brokered it. Labor Secretary Alexis Herman praised it as an example of "common ground" between labor and management. The leaders of the United Auto Workers International Union (UAW) thought it had a new contract that finally would wind up the six-and-a-half-year conflict at the company's six U.S. plants.

But over the following weekend, Caterpillar workers sent a different message. Union members rejected the contract by a vote of 58 percent to 42 percent.

Only paid-up union members were allowed to vote. This eliminated some 4,000 former UAW workers who had crossed picket lines. So, only about 8,000 to 9,000 of Caterpillar's more than 12,500 UAW-represented employees were eligible to vote. Of those, an estimated 5,900 cast ballots.

The contract offer contained a lot of things workers resent, but often put up with these days. It had a two-tier wage set-up that allows Caterpillar to hire new employees at 70 percent of the base wage, a gap that would take all six years of the contract to close. Retirees would be required to pay a new \$100-a-month medical premium. More temporary workers would be allowed in the plants. Flexible schedules that dodge overtime pay for weekend work would be written into the contract.

The offer also had some commendable elements: a \$500-a-month increase in pension benefits by the end of the contract,

wage gains (although some would be lump sums), and a generous severance package for the workers at a York, Pa., plant that is scheduled to close.

With a third of the work force eligible for retirement during the proposed agreement, the company thought the pension sweetener would carry the contract. "The company banked on dividing the membership, getting those 4,200 potential retirees to vote their pocketbooks," a worker at the East Peoria, Ill., plant told Reuters before the vote.

If the vote had been strictly on the merits of the contract, it might have passed. But the new contract was part of a bigger deal in which the union agreed to drop the 441 National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) unfair labor practice charges that it had accumulated against Caterpillar if the company suspended its legal actions against the union. While the union won back the jobs of 110 workers who had been fired during the prolonged dispute, the agreement left 50 other fired workers out on the street. Their cases would go to arbitration. All those who had crossed the picket lines, on the other hand, would get amnesty from any union charges.

Dropping the NLRB charges would have eliminated any leverage that the union still has over Caterpillar. More importantly, though, for many workers, leaving 50 of the most active strikers out in the cold seemed a fundamental breach of solidarity. As Larry Solomon, former president of UAW Local 751 at Caterpillar's Decatur, Ill., plant, puts it, "The 441 unfair labor practice charges were down the toilet, and we would have sacrificed the frontline people, the strongest union people, to the company."

**T**he struggle at Caterpillar began in 1991 when the company refused to follow the industry bargaining pattern set that year at John Deere. Instead, Caterpillar demanded a two-tier wage system for new hires and a move toward a managed health care plan. In response, the UAW went out on strike in November of that year. The company upped the ante by threatening to bring in permanent replacement workers, which led the UAW to call off the initial strike in April 1992.

The UAW's retreat sent shock waves through the U.S. labor movement. A Wisconsin labor newspaper carried the headline, "Bigger Than PATCO." If a union as strong as the UAW could be forced to surrender, what could weaker unions hope for?

Unable to move the company with pressure tactics inside the plant, the UAW returned to the picket lines in 1994. In December 1995, UAW members overwhelmingly rejected Caterpillar's "final" offer, but the union ordered the strikers back to work anyway after Caterpillar brought in replacements and a growing number of UAW members crossed the line. That offer was similar in most respects to the agreement that workers turned down in February. After that, Caterpillar imposed its own one-sided reign of terror in which there were no "collective bargaining relationships."

Despite turmoil in many plants, Caterpillar saw its profits soar from \$955 million in 1994 to \$1.67 billion in 1997.

The union had a hard time standing up to the company because it had already been seriously weakened by corporate restructuring in the '80s, during the years of labor-management cooperation. By 1991, the company had built 31 new nonunion facilities and reduced the UAW-organized sector of its work force to 25 percent. Unless the UAW succeeds in organizing Caterpillar's nonunion facilities, which it has not attempted so far, this percentage will decline further when the York plant closes and downsizing continues at other union plants.

Caterpillar also has extensive operations abroad, which allowed it to produce for its global market during the two UAW strikes. At that time, the union ignored the call from members of the UAW New Directions Movement, a rank-and-file reform caucus, to contact Brazil's militant Caterpillar workers and ask for solidarity actions.

Just as the strikers returned to work in December 1995, Caterpillar filed a suit in U.S. District Court in Pennsylvania that challenged much of the structure of day-to-day workplace bargaining in U.S. industry. Caterpillar argued that it was illegal for the company to pay the wages of full-time union shop-floor representatives—a common practice in unionized companies.

The District Court ruled in favor of Caterpillar, but the decision was overturned on appeal in March 1997. Caterpillar, in turn, appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which agreed in January to hear the case. Its final ruling may not be issued for well over a year.

In the meantime, the UAW is on tenterhooks because the union's highly institutionalized grievance structure, not to mention its governing Administration Caucus, rests on an army of full-time workplace reps. A decision in favor of Caterpillar would either cost the union millions, or bring about a drastic reduction in the number of full-time workplace reps not only at Caterpillar but in the auto industry and

elsewhere. It is little wonder that UAW Vice President Richard Shoemaker said the February pact was in the union's "best interest."

The Big Three automakers oppose Caterpillar in this case. On their behalf, the American Automobile Manufacturers Association filed a brief supporting the union's position. Finding this set-up illegal, it stated, would "significantly disrupt both the companies' operating practices and the structures of collective bargaining relationships in the U.S. automobile industry."

**U**AW leaders campaigned to get the recent agreement ratified. Local union presidents from Caterpillar plants in East Peoria, Aurora, Ill., and Memphis, Tenn., who had been promoted to staff positions as international reps, were sent out to sell the deal to their former locals.

Meanwhile, rank-and-file-generated leaflets, buttons and a little shop-floor 'zine called "Kick The Cat" carried information and the "vote no" message to workers in the six plants.

The strongest opposition to the contract offer came from the Decatur plant, the heart of the Illinois "War Zone" where Caterpillar strikers joined those at A.E. Staley and Bridge-stone/Firestone in a unique mutual alliance in the mid-'90s. UAW members in Decatur booed the international rep sent to explain the offer and ultimately rejected it by 91 percent.

In East Peoria, the location of the company's largest U.S. plant, where both the former and present local presidents recommended accepting the agreement, members of Local 974 voted it down by 61 percent. It was also defeated by Local 2096 in Pontiac, Ill.

Tempers flared in Aurora, when fired East Peoria Local 974 member Jim Fisher attempted to distribute leaflets urging rejection of the agreement. UAW officials threatened to call the police. In the end, the Aurora plant voted for the contract by 81 percent. The agreement also passed at smaller plants in Memphis, York and Denver.

The UAW's retreat in 1991 and again in 1995 has made management more aggressive. Encouraged by Caterpillar's intransigent stance against the UAW strike in 1994, John Deere tried to introduce a two-tier wage pattern but eventually relented. In 1997, with the UAW still on the ropes, Deere came back and won the 70 percent pay solution and six-year contract that Caterpillar copied this year. Now, negotiations at Case, another farm-equipment producer, face rough going.

Winning an acceptable contract and rebuilding the union at Caterpillar may well be the toughest challenge that the UAW has faced in decades. Any future offer will probably have to include reinstating the 50 fired union members.

While no one knows what will happen next, Mike Legel of Local 974 in Peoria expressed the feelings of many workers when he told the *Detroit Sunday Journal*, "Hopefully, Caterpillar will come to the realization that we are not about to abandon our brothers who were illegally discharged." Legel said that workers feel they "did the right thing," but admits, "we are still taking a risk that it will take a long time." ■

**Kim Moody** is director of the Detroit-based newsletter *Labor Notes* and the author of *Workers in a Lean World: Unions in the International Economy* (Verso).



# Food Fight

By Jim Motavalli

## FOOD CO-OPS CONFRONT ORGANIC SUPERMARKET CHAINS

The line at the Park Slope Food Co-op in Brooklyn snakes all the way down the produce aisle. Things could go a little faster, but today—like every day—most of the people behind the cash registers are rank amateurs, co-op members putting in their required 2 3/4 hours per month. Park Slope is the only food co-op in the country that still requires a substantial work commitment from its owner-members. “Work is the one binding principle that makes everyone equal,” says Chris Cosma, a sculptor spending the morning stocking yogurt. “It’s difficult to make the time, but it is rewarding.”

Park Slope is something of an anomaly. Much more typical is Vermont’s very successful Brattleboro Food Co-op, which long ago abandoned work requirements, now giving members who work a 10 percent discount instead. Despite that incentive, only 400 of Brattleboro’s 1,800 active members choose to work.

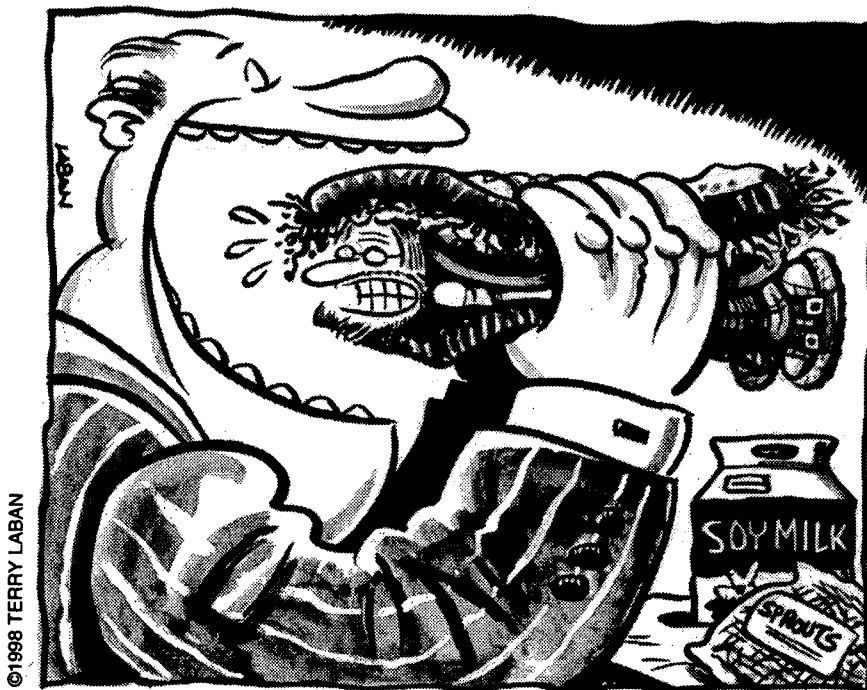
The 300 food co-ops in the United States—the vast majority of them launched in the communal afterglow of the early ’70s—are being forced to adopt the kind of mainstream business practices that they used to scorn. Even as the natural foods industry enjoys tremendous success, growing from \$178 million in sales in 1980 to more than \$4 billion today, co-ops are confronting take-no-prisoners competition from organic supermarket chains like Whole Foods and Wild Oats, whose eyes are firmly fixed on the bottom line. Despite their commitment to organic products, some of these chains openly disdain progressive values. “Where in our mission statement do we talk about trying to be liberal, progressive or

universal?” asks John Mackey, CEO of industry leader Whole Foods, which is growing at the astonishing rate of 25 percent a year.

Should food co-ops hire professional managers? Should they try to provide the one-stop shopping of the chains, which means aisles of Windex and kitty litter? Should they cut down on in-store events and classes, which take up staff time? When the competition comes from billion-dollar corporations that put customer service and product displays far ahead of doing the right thing, these issues are far from frivolous.

It wasn’t always like that. Park Slope, for example, was founded in 1973 by 10 Brooklynites who wanted to change the world, and saw the then-tiny natural foods business as a way to do it. “For me, it was about making a difference in people’s lives, community control, people working together as a team—those things felt great,” says coordinator Joe Holtz, who was one of the founders. “Some of us thought that the food co-op would be the first step toward people’s control of Brooklyn, but I think I was a little more realistic.”

Veterans of that early movement say that probably 60 food co-ops were founded in New York during the late ’60s and early ’70s, most of them growing out of social movements. The early co-ops had to educate their countercultural customer base about chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and about the health benefits of organic food. They had to create a whole new retail business, which wasn’t easy. Park Slope took deliveries on Friday, paid for them with rubber checks,



To survive the competition from Whole Foods, food co-ops are being forced to adopt the kind of mainstream business practices that they used to scorn.

and then worked all day Saturday to make the deposit before the banks opened on Monday. That first store was on the second floor, and volunteers carried 60-pound crates of celery up the stairs in shifts.

Hard work was part of the package from the beginning. The principles that food co-ops live by were drawn up by a small group of mill town utopian socialists, the Rochdale Pioneers, in the industrial north of England in 1844. Tired of grocery-store mark-ups, they created their own small cooperative to sell butter, sugar, flour and oatmeal at fair prices. Their principles, most recently amended by the International Cooperative Alliance in 1995, address such points as voluntary and open membership, democratic control and cooperation among co-ops. Most co-ops today ask new members for a \$50 to \$150 initial fee, which helps capitalize the business, and they encourage different forms of voluntary member participation.

All are firmly committed to member ownership, and most practice a truly participatory form of member management. Unlike, say, True Value hardware stores, which are cooperative in their purchasing but traditionally owned, food co-ops are democratic in structure. Member committees advise on large decisions—buying a building, for instance—and small ones—like the shelf life of organic carrots.

Astonishing as it may seem, food co-ops have never been healthier, though there's certainly been plenty of attrition. Ann Hoyt of the Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives estimates that between 50 and 75 food co-ops, some of them venerable institutions with 25-year histories, have closed in the last decade. But many of the survivors are experiencing explosive growth. Brattleboro Food Co-op, founded in 1975 as a countercultural buying club, is now a rapidly expanding \$6 million annual business that recently took over a former Price Chopper supermarket. There are more than 100 co-ops across the

country that do more than \$1 million in sales per year, according to Dave Gutknecht, publisher of the Ohio-based *Cooperative Grocer*. The average annual growth rate is around 10 percent.

The corporate competition that food co-ops now face is an inevitable result of their own success and the retail juggernaut they helped set in motion. The natural foods industry is growing 20 percent a year, compared to just 2 or 3 percent for regular supermarket chains. Whole Foods has 78 gleaming organic supermarkets in the United States, and 1997 sales of \$1 billion. The company attracts a clientele who wants to eat healthier and loves the stores' bright displays of perfect produce, but values convenience and doesn't necessarily buy into the political principles of a co-op.

Whole Foods plays hardball. President Peter Roy told the *Los Angeles Times*, "We consider all people that are selling natural and organic foods competitive with our company." The company's response is usually to buy the competition. Whole Foods has recently gobbled up such former rivals as Bread and Circus, Wellspring Markets, Mrs. Gooch's, Merchant of Vino, the Allegro Coffee Company and Fresh Fields. Only Wild Oats, a company a quarter of its size, remains a significant chain competitor.

When a buy-out is not an option, Whole Foods goes head-to-head with its competition. In 1999, Whole Foods will open a 55,000-square-foot store in Seattle and take on the Puget Consumers Co-op, the country's largest co-op with seven stores, 35,000 members and \$52 million in sales in 1997.

Whole Foods is only too happy to take over spaces vacated by failing co-ops. Whole Foods supplanted the Berkeley Food Co-op in 1990, replacing the unionized, 77 percent African-American, Asian and Latino staff with a mostly white non-union group. Only a few months after the Whole Foods store opened, Berkeley's labor commission criticized the store for



what it called a "practiced preferential hiring of young whites," and dozens of former co-op meatcutters picketed the store for more than a year. "It was really ugly for a long time," says a veteran Berkeley political activist. Today, however, the store is thriving.

Anti-union feeling is deeply ingrained at Whole Foods. CEO Mackey is the author of an anti-labor pamphlet called *Beyond Unions*, which exalts the company's team-centered management (along the lines of Japanese auto factories) as a superior form of worker organization. Most recently, Whole Foods has refused to sign a non-binding United Farm Workers petition in support of California's low-paid strawberry pickers, who work under a toxic cloud of pesticides, including the acute toxin methyl bromide.

Not all the threats faced by co-ops are external. Gutknecht, publisher of *Cooperative Grocer*, argues that it's not usually outside competition that kills co-ops. "The problems are mostly unsound management, a lack of policy direction and a failure to deliver good service," he says. And sometimes, they expand too fast. That's what happened to Connecticut's New Haven Food Co-op which, according to former board member Cynthia Savo, found itself unable to pay its bills after a move from a small storefront to a former First National supermarket. "They needed to take in \$120,000 a week, and the best they ever did was \$80,000 or \$90,000," she says, adding that it might have been better to complement the existing store with several smaller ones in various New Haven neighborhoods. The co-op closed in the early '80s.

**D**espite the myriad challenges, co-ops are holding their own. Competition has made many more pragmatic. These days, food co-ops worry most about staying competitive. Some of the smaller ones are banding together and buying collectively in order to reduce costs. Together, they say, they're as big as Wild Oats. In another move aimed at remaining price-competitive, some are trying out a model called "direct charge," pioneered by the Canadian Co-op Atlantic chain. Members pay a monthly fee (around \$20), then buy food at cost. "Anyone who spent more than \$60 a month would definitely save a lot of money," says George Keller, publisher of *The National Co-op Directory*. "The problem is getting people to buy into the idea."

At Boston's Harvest, a two-store co-op that competes with several Whole Foods-owned Bread and Circus outlets, clerks bag groceries and carry them out to customers' cars. The shelves are still stocked with goldenseal and Not Dogs, but now, because of customer demand, the natural exotica shares space with regular supermarket brands. Learning to handle competition and respond to customer requests (even when those requests are for Nabisco cookies and Kellogg's cereal) hasn't always been easy. "When food co-ops are faced with competition, they're forced to either get better at being a business or die," says general manager John Higgins. "Rectitude isn't enough; the co-op principles should be an added value."

Co-ops have lost some of the consciousness-raising zeal they had when they were lonely crusaders for the natural foods cause. Purists like Park Slope's Joe Holtz argue that by focusing on financial performance, by stocking more main-

stream fare and, especially, by ending work requirements, co-ops have moved away from their core principles. But Andy Ferguson, president of the Cooperative Development Institute in Greenfield, Mass., says that Park Slope is unique, and that most co-ops don't have the luxury of staying the way they were 30 years ago. "The co-ops that work hard at managing well and listening to members are thriving," says Alex Gyori, Brattleboro's general manager.

In an era with few visible models of cooperative management, food co-ops offer dynamic proof that workplace democracy can be compatible with business growth. Despite all the ways they have had to compromise, food co-ops are still vastly different from the publicly traded chains. Park Slope, for instance, is a community center as much as a grocery store. There's a monthly concert series, food classes, dances, parties, potluck suppers and free lectures by members on everything from homeopathy to aerobic walking.

But even at Park Slope, capitalism lurks just below the surface. The co-op's work rule is obviously a significant inconvenience for some members—a store bulletin board is thick with notes begging others to take their shifts. In a bold display of entrepreneurship, local teenagers have even taken to working members' shifts for pay. When his growing business was the subject of a muckraking exposé in the co-op newsletter, *Linewaiters' Gazette*, 17-year-old Matt Levy jokingly asked the reporter to "include my phone number." ■

Jim Motavalli is editor of E Magazine.

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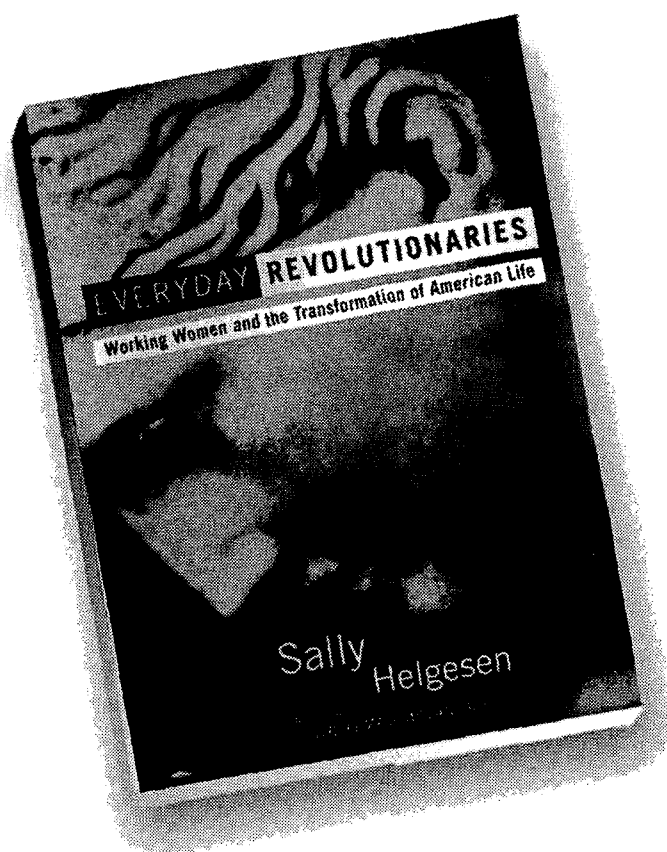
## **Everyday Revolutionaries: Working Women and the Transformation of American Life**

By Sally Helgesen

Doubleday

276 pages, \$24.95

REVIEWED BY CATHY MASON



Americans these days are in a self-congratulatory mood. We have proclaimed this the Information Age. The scale and speed of contemporary life parallels the scale and speed of computer technology. Ads revel in the web of activity we've woven of life, as if sheer busyness gives life meaning or makes us important. Sally Helgesen celebrates these trends and the movers and shakers who engage in the "filofax way of life." The everyday revolutionaries of her title are the new "typical" Americans—working women. In their attitudes, she sees a "chasm between the popular images of a populace that feels overwhelmed and frightened and these pioneers who are consciously fashioning a new way of life."

Helgesen, a writer for *Glamour*, also wrote *The Female Advantage*, a 1990 book about women in upper management. That study made similarly grand pronouncements about women's ability to face the challenges of post-industrial America, "pointing the way and giving direction to a common future." Both works discuss the implications of one of the most dramatic and observable

changes in American life over the last 30 years: the unprecedented influx of women into the workplace. Helgesen congratulates women for their "flowing and holistic approach to work and life," which gives them an advantage over men in adapting to "a world in which change is constant."

Helgesen writes in an impossibly rhetorical tone. Take, for example, her hyperbolic use of the word "revolutionary." It is true that women's efforts to attain equal rights and opportunity in the workplace have led to changes in everything from who holds certain family responsibilities to how businesses are run. But Helgesen does not describe the political revolt of women so much as their decidedly post-revolutionary nesting patterns. Many of the women with whom she spoke would not classify themselves as feminist, because, Helgesen explains, Americans have a "general discomfort with labels." Her sample women and their families, as she describes them, are merely responding to changing conditions, coping with, and sometimes thriving in, the post-industrial marketplace. But calling them

revolutionaries implies that they represent an alternative (or at least a political challenge) to the current order—not that they simply adapt to it.

Using interviews and statistics, Helgesen contrasts the contemporary "edge city" of Naperville, Ill., to the Chicago suburb of Park Forest, the subject of William Whyte's 1956 study, *The Organization Man*. Located in one of the fastest-growing areas in the country, Naperville represents what the author calls the new "hearth" of civilization: a suburb that no longer depends upon a larger city. High-tech companies such as AT&T and Motorola thrive alongside booming small businesses; people live, shop and spend leisure time in Naperville. Sixty-eight percent of Naperville women work for an income, most outside the home, although many telecommute or run a small business from their house. The median income is well above the national average, and local real estate agents don't even like to show houses that are selling for less than a quarter-of-a-million dollars.

While Helgesen's descriptions of how the nature and scale of suburban life have



changed in the last 40 years are cogent, her assessments of quality of life are largely materialistic. The residents of Naperville do have more money than the organization men of the previous generation. (Two cars were a luxury in '50s Park Forest, while one cannot build a house in Naperville now without a three-car garage!) Helgesen is fond of one resident's observation that life today is "like Starbucks—you don't just order coffee, you specify precisely what kind you want." But there is a big difference between a broad array of consumer choices and real diversity.

In fact, Naperville has comparatively little in the way of public culture, and its residents lead far more uncertain and frenetic lives than their predecessors. Helgesen presents, in breathless lists, the many different kinds of people, religions and self-improvement programs available in Naperville. Yet, the women she actually interviews are overwhelmingly white and upper-middle class. Despite having one of the best public school systems, Helgesen reports, most of her interview subjects sent their children to private schools. Helgesen never critiques the absence of democratic institutions.

This is not how Whyte expected things to turn out. He predicted that if corporate-fed suburban culture continued to dominate American life, Americans would become too conventional and too easily accepting of "communal values." Helgesen happily dismisses those fears as obsolete, thanks to vast changes in business culture over the past few decades. Instead of bureaucracy and conformity, she argues, America has developed a diverse and entrepreneurial culture, where "people tend to define themselves in terms of individual differences rather than broad similarities." Never mind that "identity" culture as she presents it sounds more rigid and potentially stultifying than the homogeneity of '50s suburbs.

Each chapter of *Everyday Revolutionaries* highlights a particular aspect of suburban life, from work to religion (which she characterizes as less religion than therapy), meticulously contrasting contemporary practice with that of the '50s. Helgesen has thought seriously about changes in our culture, but she

comes to no conclusions, only rhetorical summations and gross generalizations. For example, she refers in grand terms to the new integration of work and home life as enabling women to become "whole persons" with "complex identities," when she is simply describing a woman working at home at her computer while watching the kids. And while she notes the "painful squeeze of time" and other consequences of long hours and over-scheduled lives, she refuses to question the values that created the problem in the first place.

The author contends that, in the new suburbs, women's roles are "fluid," their decisions "proactive," and everything about them reeks of "diversity"—which only means that there is plenty of consumer choice. Instead of actually interviewing men, Helgesen borrows a type from *The Organization Man* and Henry Mintzberg's *The Nature of Managerial Work*. She uncritically accepts those authors' contention that work makes men conventional and that men tend to derive their identity solely from their position in the corporate hierarchy. She assumes that what Whyte and Mintzberg said about American men in the '50s and '60s holds true for American men in the '90s. Obviously, those men compare unfavorably to the "fluid" women she interviews.

Still, many of her observations are apt. Social and economic upheaval have

made the work and home lives of many Americans peripatetic and uncertain. The effort to secure a space for ourselves despite these harsh exigencies is a worthy subject for study. Women have always moved in and out of the workplace in order to care for children or elderly parents, and they have been more likely to change jobs or enroll in continuing education as adults. So women may, in fact, possess an advantage over men who expected to work their way up the ladder. Further, women might be better suited, traditionally, to the increasingly home-based and time-flexible work environment made possible by computer technology.

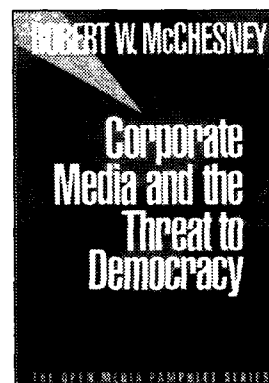
Unfortunately, Helgesen so wants to believe that anything her subjects do to survive in today's economic climate is somehow valiant that she forgoes all critical thinking. Although she uses the terms interchangeably, information is not knowledge and a busy life is not necessarily one well-lived. Perhaps residents of high-tech boomtowns will enjoy the figurative pat on the back this book provides (and just knowing that they are now "typical" must be a rush!). Unfortunately, the upbeat tone of this study masks what Helgesen actually presents: a chilling look at a Middletown for the next millennium. ■

Cathy Mason is a writer specializing in cultural and women's history.

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## **Tibet: Abode of the Gods, Pearl of the Motherland**

By Barbara Erickson

Pacific View Press, 302 pages, \$22.95

REVIEWED BY PAT ARNOW

Journalist Barbara Erickson spent many months during the early '90s traveling around Tibet, trying to find out the state of the country's health care, education, environment, agriculture, government and culture. By keeping a low profile, she was able to attain rare access to a country that has been largely closed to outsiders since being occupied by China in 1959.

In the first part of the book, Erickson visits the capital of Lhasa and tiny villages, interviewing Tibetan and Chinese hotel workers, farmers and nomads. She is an evenhanded reporter, reasonably sorting out conflicting claims. About the environment, she notes, "The Chinese are correct in saying that they have brought tractors, cars, roads, irrigation canals, and electric lights to Tibet, but the International Campaign for Tibet and its supporters are also correct in noting that since the Chinese took control ... the ancient forests of southern and eastern Tibet are now scarred with barren, clear-cut slopes."

But the dispassionate accounts and lists of facts and statistics give way to a less objective tone in later chapters, when she discusses government and human rights. Here, Erickson's conclusions are as harsh as any critics of the Chinese occupation. "[When] the oppressive controls become too much for some to bear," she writes, "the state uses torture, murder, intimidation and blacklists to force them into silence."

Because so much information about Tibet contains more passion than hard data, the firsthand accounts, balanced reporting and variety of sources make this work a particularly helpful guide. Erickson provides a sound basis for one to judge the impact of decades of Chinese occupation of Tibet. ■

## **A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society**

By Lawrence B. Glickman

Cornell University Press, 220 pages, \$35

REVIEWED BY DANIEL COLEMAN

Anyone interested in contemporary efforts to secure a living wage will be rewarded by this history of living-wage campaigns, from their inception during the mid-19th century through the New Deal era. Author Lawrence Glickman argues that the call for a living wage, like the campaigns for an eight-hour workday during the same era, represented a shift from a producerist perspective of labor organization—in which workers struggle to control the surplus value of labor—to a consumerist perspective—in which workers seek wages that provide for the material needs of their families.

But Glickman does not recognize that the consumer is a specialized role uniquely fitted to the social and economic requirements of capitalism—a role significantly less powerful than that of worker or citizen. In accepting the role of consumers, 20th-century workers have conceded much of the game to capital.

For Glickman, living-wage discourse "suggests the possibility that wage labor might at least theoretically be an integral part of a just social order." Today, labor activists, firmly moored in this assumption, are often at the forefront of efforts to establish a living wage and to raise the sub-poverty-level federally mandated minimum wage.

Unfortunately, Glickman fails to give proper weight to the activity of a still earlier generation. These mid-19th-century activists saw the wage system itself as contradictory to the ideals of freedom, equality, independence and citizenship. Their concerns are important, since they reject the notion that a just society can be reconciled with the inherent inequities of capitalism. ■

## **Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You**

By Fred Chappell

Picador, 228 pages, \$12

REVIEWED BY PAT ARNOW

*Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You* begins as so many Appalachian tales do—a death in the family unleashes stories. In this case, the stories are about the women of the Kirkman family in western North Carolina. A young boy named Jess is the book's narrator, passing along stories that his mother and grandmother told him as he sat by his grandmother's deathbed. Though most of the tales are old-fashioned—and filled with modest women who are strong, forthright and good housekeepers—their telling is magical.

Though proper women, the Kirkman women are not sanctimonious, and they can't resist a good turn of phrase. "I'm sorry for Marilou," says Jess' mother at one point, pulling over to the side of a mountainous road to finish one story. "'Her husband's pecker had to be awful scrawny,' she said, 'because that's where he kept his brains.' She reached for a Kleenex out of the pocket of her gray cotton sweater and blotted her face and breathed deep and we started off again."

Now in paperback, *Farewell* is the final installment in Chappell's trilogy about the Kirkman family. The first book, *I Am One of You Forever*, focused on the men in the family, and was filled with screamingly funny stories about Jess' father, the tireless practical joker Joe Robert. But that book contained heartbreaking stories, too. *Farewell*, like the second installment, *Brighten the Corner Where You Are*, is not quite as good. But together, the works establish Chappell as the master poet of the Southern mountains. ■



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*Continued from page 30*

**ST:** Johnson wanted it to pass, whereas Kennedy was not like that.

**TB:** To give Kennedy credit, he knew that he was risking the solid Democratic South and he didn't believe he could support it and stay in office. Johnson didn't care. And what do we have now, 30 years later? We have a solid Republican South. Johnson had two motives. Number one, he wanted to prove that he was not a hick Southerner, that he was larger than people thought. Number two, as you get further into this, when you read some of the eloquent speeches that he gave that didn't get much coverage, he really believed this stuff. He learned it from Mexicans and dirt-poor farmers. He believed we have the power to better ourselves, and he applied it to the Civil Rights Act in a ferocious way.

**ST:** One of Johnson's teachers, his idol, was the great New Dealer Aubrey Williams, a remarkable Southerner who defied them all. He was the head of FDR's National Youth Administration when LBJ was the head of the young Texas NYA.

**TB:** Aubrey Williams was his first boss, but by the time Johnson was president, Aubrey had been discarded. He might as well have been a communist because he had been a radical on the race question. It was not safe for Johnson to talk to him or about him in public—but he could talk in private.

**ST:** On the subject of communism, that was used all the time in the civil rights movement, and we know about the phone tapping of Martin Luther King sponsored by Robert F. Kennedy and J. Edgar Hoover, an interesting duet. Though they loathed each other, they were together in tapping every aspect of King's life.

**TB:** They did loathe each other. Hoover maneuvered Bobby Kennedy into having to sign that wiretap request on Martin Luther King because Bobby Kennedy needed Hoover to protect Jack Kennedy from things that were being done against him. This was a snake pit, but Bobby Kennedy knew that when he handed Hoover that piece of paper with his signature on it authorizing a wiretap on Martin Luther King. It was giving Hoover dynamite, and he could never control Hoover again. As it happened, he authorized the wiretapping right before President Kennedy was assassinated. But Hoover then had his piece of paper. He could wiretap King for the rest of his life.

**ST:** It's fashionable to put down the '60s as a time of extremism, whereas this was one moment when the young had causes outside themselves, didn't they?

**TB:** They had tremendous discipline—and faith in people that good things could happen when they didn't have reason to believe they could happen. But the discipline of the freedom riders in this nonviolent period should be the envy of us all. We live in an age when the thrift industry and the bankers are urging us to hock our houses in home-equity loans, and they don't have any discipline whatsoever. The discipline of these kids is so striking that I cringe every time I hear people say that the '60s were a time of indulgence and no discipline. It couldn't be further from the truth.

**ST:** They had causes, which leads, of course, to Vietnam.

**TB:** My most difficult interview in the whole book—of the thousands of interviews I did—was of Robert McNamara on Vietnam because he was more pained and withdrawn about that subject than anyone else. What is clear from these records and the phone conversations and the meetings is that Johnson knew from the very beginning that we had no business there, that we had no support there, that we had no cause there. McNamara says in aching detail, "I don't know what to tell people who I'm going to send over there to die for nothing." It's not that he didn't understand. It's not that he was duped. It's not that he wasn't smart enough. It was that he was afraid of being called chicken.

**ST:** That's that macho aspect again.

**TB:** It was a testosterone-character war.

**ST:** Now we've got to go to the other heroes, those Southern people, sharecroppers, the farmers, the ordinary people wanting to vote.

**TB:** In St. Augustine, Fla., I found an old lady named Georgia Reed. She was crippled, she had polio. In St. Augustine in 1964, everyone had gone to jail. It was very violent. Civil rights leaders needed black volunteers for a sit-in and they were desperate. They went to the back of the church where the people were cooking and said, "We have to have somebody to go to jail," and this little crippled lady, Georgia Reed, who was maybe in her 60s then, stepped forward on her crutches and said, "I'll go to jail," and she came out in the church. People started applauding, and she got upset and shook her head. Everybody got quiet, and she said, "I'm ready to go to jail, but not unless somebody will take me home so I can put on a better dress—I'm in my cooking dress, I'm not in my going-to-jail dress." So she went to jail.

The movement is this incredible mixture of great heroes like Martin Luther King and these ordinary men and women who stepped forward like that.

**ST:** We haven't talked about Malcolm X and a remarkable speech he made in the South to the kids on the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in 1965.

**TB:** He went to Selma right before he was killed, knowing that he was going to be killed. They were terrified about what he might say. They didn't want him to speak. They were terrified about what this incendiary would say, and here's what he actually did say, just three sentences: "Standing in the church with people scared, I'm not intending to try and stir you up and make you do something that you wouldn't have done anyway," he said to applause and a chorus of laughter. "I pray God will bless you and everything that you do. I pray that you will grow intellectually, so that you can understand the problems of the world and where you fit into that world picture, and I pray that all the fear that has ever been in your heart will be taken out." ■

**Studs Terkel's most recent book is** *My American Century* (New Press). His interview with Taylor Branch aired February 4 and 5 on Chicago's public radio station, WBEZ. Thanks to WBEZ for assistance and permission to use the interview.

By Studs Terkel

***In the end***

# Heroes of the Civil Rights Era

Taylor Branch talks about the second volume in his history of the civil rights movement, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1963-65*.

*In Volume Two of this remarkable trilogy, every aspect—the civil rights movement, Vietnam, the battle in the South, what happened in the north—is part of this panorama that you paint. It's a chronicle like none other I've read on this movement.*

Dr. King, at the end of '63, really was despairing that the civil rights bill would never pass under Kennedy. He did not believe it would have ever passed if Kennedy had not been killed. Because what we got out of the assassination was the national remorse and feeling that violence and prejudice had somehow caused this huge tragedy, people were ready for some sort of healing. It made everybody more in favor of the civil rights bill, but on top of that, it brought in Lyndon Johnson, who came on like gangbusters. The first picture in the book is him with his nose about this far from Richard Russell, telling his old mentor in the Senate, who was leading the filibuster against the civil rights bill, "Dick, if you get in my way, I want to tell you, I want to run you down."

*Continued on page 25*

